University of Alberta

Learning About the Land: Tetlit Gwich'in Perspectives on Sustainable Resource Use

by

Ara Elizabeth Murray

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Learning About the Land: Tetlit Gwich'in Perspectives on Sustainable Resource Use, submitted by Ara Elizabeth Murray in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

This thesis describes aspects of Tetlit Gwich'in perspectives on sustaining their land, as they were communicated within the context of a sustainable forest management project. Past and present uses of forest resources, *i.e.*, wood for steamship fuel, construction and smokehouses, as well as berry patches, are examined within the context of the social relations in which they are embedded, or what is locally referred to as "living on the land," and a selection of Gwich'in women's contributions to the continuation of Gwich'in culture are included. The concept of sustainability as it is usually invoked with regards to management and resource use is examined in relation to certain aspects of the Gwich'in relationship with the land, and in relation to the ways in which Gwich'in perspectives were made accessible to non-Gwich'in researchers. Fieldwork was conducted in Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories during the summer months of 1999 and 2000.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to mention that over the last few years, Thomas and Eileen Koe and their family have generously shared with me, among many other things, their home, their time, and a great deal of their knowledge and insight. I have learned more from my experiences with Eileen, Thomas and their family than I have been able to show on the pages of this thesis. Conversations with Eileen Koe have not only taught me about respect, but about how to begin to make use of the potential that it holds and this is the message that I have tried to pass on in this thesis.

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I would like to express appreciation to my parents, Richard Murray and Debra Schuler-Murray, as their interests and ideas have largely contributed to my own, and to my grandfather, Ray Schuler, who has devoted many an hour to helping me consider different opinions and perspectives. Rob Wishart has contributed to this thesis with his patience and support, but more importantly he introduced me to Fort McPherson and his talent for anthropological fieldwork has been exemplary in many ways.

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Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

In 1999 and 2000 I spent the summer months in Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories, as part of an interdisciplinary research team led by Dr. David Anderson of the Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta and Dr. Ross Wein of the Department of Renewable Resources, University of Alberta. This project was funded by the Sustainable Forest Management Network Centre of Excellence, and was carried out in partnership with the Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board and the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute. It was initiated in 1997 upon a request by the Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board for assistance in drafting a sustainable forestry management plan (Anderson 2000:i). In response to this request, our team made use of "oral history, archival research, participant observation, and studies of forest regeneration rates to set existing forest practices within a context of industrial forest use in the recent past and within contexts of proposed future developments" (*ibid.*:1).

My responsibilities included gathering oral information to be considered along with the archival material concerning the historical industrial use of the forests (*e.g.*, for steamship fuel, construction), and learning about the use of other forest resources such as berries and plants for non-industrial purposes. The overall purpose of the project, to learn about the central concepts and categories relating to Gwich'in forestry (*ibid.*:i), has enabled me to focus this thesis in a way that is intended to contribute to the forestry project but at the same time takes a somewhat different direction.

In this thesis I will discuss the ways in which, as a field researcher, I learned from Gwich'in people, how they sustain a relationship with the land and how this has

implications for the application of foreign concepts like "sustainability," and "sustainable forest management" to Gwich'in uses of forest resources. My fieldwork experiences result from my position as a researcher associated with the forestry management project, which is part of a nation-wide effort to ensure that Canada's Boreal Forest is managed in such a way that "it can be sustained in all its physical, biological, ecological, economic, and cultural dimensions" (Sustainable Forest Management Network 1999:2). Long term forest management plans are ultimately used to manage the ways in which forest resources are used and are experienced in different ways by the people who use the forests for various reasons. The application of the concept of sustainability to a project about forest management in the context of a Gwich'in community provides a valuable opportunity to examine the ways in which such a concept, formulated from a non-Gwich'in perspective, may be commensurable with local Gwich'in perspectives and values. However, to separate local Gwich'in categories, perspectives and concerns about their land from the way that Gwich'in people communicate these categories, perspectives and concerns is to take them out of context therefore limit the possibility of more fully appreciating their social meanings. By using a selection of ideas found in contemporary cultural and linguistic anthropology I will focus on the cross-cultural communication of the local significance of the land, and explore this process in detail. As Greg Sarris writes of conversation that can be characterized as cross-cultural, "it is an art generating respect for the unknown while illuminating the borders of the known" (Sarris 1994:33).

I found that the most difficult part of fieldwork was responding to questions, although friendly ones, about what I was doing in the community. Although I had the luxury of associating myself with David Anderson, who was already known and

welcomed in the community of Fort McPherson, I usually found it difficult to explain well or fully the forestry project that I was part of. Most people seemed satisfied to learn that I worked for David Anderson, that I wanted to learn about the Gwich'in way of life, and that I hoped to do so by spending time with people out on the land. My explanation of the forest management project was not of much interest, especially when I tried to separate learning about the Gwich'in way of life from the goals of the forestry project. However, I did need to make it clear why I was in the community and what I would be writing reports about. In the process of trying to tell people that we needed to learn about where and how people had used the forest, where they cut wood for steamships, and how they specifically used trees, I was finally able to realize that focusing so much on trees was a somewhat inappropriate way to learn about anything relevant to the forestry project.

In order to sufficiently consider "how local voices can contribute to theoretical paradigms that frame contemporary scholarship" as Julie Cruikshank recommends to those participating in cross-cultural research (1998:xiii), I have tried to give balanced consideration to Gwich'in values placed on sustaining resources, and to the values of those seeking to establish a long term forest management plan to sustain forest resources, as represented by our forestry project. My first field season included many conversations in which people would explain to me that they did not need or want any more researchers taking information from the Gwich'in in order to establish plans and policies for them. From this perspective, the concept of sustainable management and the way it is often established, is in itself problematic. The Gwich'in who voiced these concerns to me are not against cross-cultural research, rather they are strongly aware of the implications of

research that is assumed to be free of cultural constraints. These conversations are important to acknowledge because they represent the frustration that many Gwich'in voice with regard to their relationships with non-Gwich'in researchers. Throughout my field work, even after people had given approval for our research team's methodology, people would often talk about the disappointments of non-Gwich'in visitors not showing interest in learning about local life and perspectives, and equally as often about the pleasures of having the opportunities to share knowledge in ways that are appropriate by Gwich'in standards.

The concept of "sustainability" is frequently invoked in connection with a diverse array of theoretical, economic and environmental concerns and with reference to development, management, and resource use. Since the World Commission on Environment and Development coined the phrase "sustainable development" in 1987, an immense amount of literature, crossing many disciplines, has appeared on this subject. The WCED defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (1987:43). The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development states:

> Reconciling economic development, social equity and environmental quality is at the core of sustainable development. The challenge in defining sustainable development is that it means different things to different people; it is a reflection of community values. [DIAND 1997:8]

As many have pointed out, the concept of "sustainability" itself is recognized as poorly understood and often difficult to negotiate (Becker *et al.* 1999:4; Hoage *et al.* 1998:ix; Wuttunnee 1998:124). This forestry project in particular must face the difficulties involved with defining the concept of sustainability. As this forestry project was centered

around reflecting community values and perspectives, it provides an excellent point of entry into a cross-cultural examination of this concept.

In response to the challenges involved in defining sustainable development at a local level, Richard Preston, *et al.*, write that the "the starting point for an analysis of sustainability and development is the issue of *world view*, the way in which a culture looks at and orders the world around it" (1995:379). The concept of sustainability as it is connected to development and management is not characteristic of the Gwich'in world view, and as conversations with my Gwich'in teachers have shown me, a project working "towards" the establishment of sustainability is culturally situated elsewhere.

The concept of sustainability is situated in a larger social and political context, represented locally by the Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board, a co-management board created as a result of the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (Raygorodetsky 1997:14). This board, created to manage and monitor renewable resources on Gwich'in lands, is a partnership between representatives of the Gwich'in and the Federal Government. Claudia Notzke writes that new to many First Nations communities "is a growing opportunity to practice, develop, preserve and share their ideas and experiences in this field" (1994:4). This "growing opportunity" refers to the establishment of co-management boards. While they are theoretically joint endeavors between First Nations and the Federal Government, the efforts to establish sustainable management plans and to comply with the standards associated with sustainable development reflect an underlying assumption that "sustainability" is something that the First Nation in question should work towards, develop, measure and ultimately achieve.

If, as Preston *et al.* suggest, an analysis of sustainability must begin with a consideration of world view (1995:379), Gwich'in knowledge of forest resources is most productively examined in connection to a larger system of meaning. It should follow then that Gwich'in concerns about the "forests," and Gwich'in understandings of the notion of "sustainability" and of a "sustainable forest" are notably different from those represented in other cultural perspectives. While different cultural perspectives may likely be commensurable in important ways, it is crucial that such ways not be assumed or based on locally problematic research questions. Legal, political, and civil rights to cultural and economic autonomy are an important part of the First Nations' relationships to Canadian society (Asch 1993:28). Recognition, outside the Gwich'in community, of Gwich'in rights to cultural autonomy requires that concepts used to influence, in any possible way, the Gwich'in relationship to their land, be carefully examined.

Rather than use quotation marks every time I use the phrase "forest resources," or simply "resources," I will point out that it is a term originating in the research mandate and not my field work. It arises out of the vocabulary used to describe the environment with an economic and industrial focus, and is in no way analogous with the Gwich'in vocabulary that is used to describe the same environment. For example, when I would meet people in Fort McPherson, or more frequently at Eight Miles, they would often ask how I liked "living on the land." Or when I would explain to someone that I was there to learn about how people use the forests, people would immediately tell me that this would best be done by "living on the land" with people for a while. As an inexperienced field worker, it has taken me an excruciating amount of time to realize the obvious implications of these conversations.

Initially, I had hoped to learn specifically about Gwich'in women's knowledge of forest resources in order to contribute to the larger forestry project. As a young woman it was socially appropriate that I spend time with Gwich'in women, and therefore had the opportunity to become familiar with perspectives that might not be as readily available to a male researcher. However to present Gwich'in women's knowledge of the land, or of the trees that are part of it, as an isolated entity is a false separation of Gwich'in women's knowledge from men's. The further separation of Gwich'in women's knowledge about forest resources from Gwich'in women's knowledge about the land or, on a more general level, from Gwich'in social and cultural understandings, would not reflect local categories or perspectives. As Robert Wishart writes about centering research on Gwich'in "forest practices," it is impossible to answer specific questions about such practices without looking at a wider spectrum of activities (Wishart in Anderson, *et al.*2000:6). Once I began to allow for a more suitable focus it became clear that Gwich'in uses of forest resources are part of living, or being "on the land" and, further, revolve around a complex set of social relations. In chapter three I explore the discursive construction of these social relations. I will also investigate the anthropological literature that suggests kin relations, rather than an assumed model of gender difference, to constitute an appropriate theoretical framework with which to approach learning about societies labeled as hunter-gatherer.

One way to examine "sustainability" in a Gwich'in context is through examples of local discourse concerning the Gwich'in relationship to the land. In chapter two I discuss the importance of oral history as a research methodology that takes into account the situated nature of such communication. Talk on the radio is a good example to begin

with as it is not affected by my participation as a researcher (other examples, to be considered later, are important precisely because of my presence as a researcher).

Everyone in Fort McPherson listens to CBQM, the only radio station, and many take advantage of the connection between bush radios and the radio station as a messaging service. The Gwich'in land figures into every Gwich'in person's discussions in some way or another: messages are constantly being sent back and forth from town to camps on CBQM, and on the bush radio between camps, and from camps to town. In all these messages, references are made to what is going on with people in town and out on the land in a forum open to all. An awareness that people are out on the land checking on things, seeing things, hunting, fishing, and traveling, pervades life in Fort McPherson, and this is especially noticeable to me as an outsider. "The Mr. Colin's Show" is a popular and regular show on CBQM. On his show Mr. Colin plays music, tells stories and "old time stories," talks about current events and relays messages. Mr. Colin continually speaks about, and to, people that are passing time on the land, as in the following excerpts[1]. After playing a song by Dean Martin one summer night, Mr. Colin said:

> Those couples out there really like that song so, you know what leads there, so do a little smile at each other, that's the way to be so.. Good evening to everybody down Mackenzie Delta or you driving on the highway, maybe some people up the river, way up the river. I hope you enjoy the evening, and listen to CBQM until maybe twelve o'clock so enjoy the radio okay…

Then later, after playing some fiddle music, he continued:

> Okay it's time now it's a little after twelve o'clock. And kind of cool here,

[1] Following the work of John Gumperz and Norine Berenz (1982:121), I have used two dots to indicate pauses less than .5 second, and three dots for pauses greater than .5 second. I have also used parenthesis to indicate "a good guess at an unclear word," although in this case Neil Colin uses the Gwich'in word, I have indicated my guess in English because I could not find a corresponding Gwich'in spelling.

> cloudy skies, and I guess there's a little bit of snow up there at the Yukon border 23rd of July. Oh boy I never seen this before…
> You know this weather interfering with us, I call it el Niño yeah, el Niño it means keep quiet[2]. Yeah, el Niño weather still interfering up here in the Mackenzie Delta. Oh boy I can't understand it, yeah, no water, water's rising. Goodness yeah. Few fish, few (fish guts), and stocking cooked to the fire and salt yeah. Oh boy. Here, Let's go …
> [Neil Colin, "The Mr. Colin's Show," July 23, 1999]

The people that Mr.Colins is saying hello to on the Mackenzie delta and up the river are staying out in their fish camps at this time of year, and his reference to eating fish guts cooked to the fire is also to people out at their fish camps as this is rarely done in town (when it is done in town the guts are usually roasted in an oven, and are not considered to be nearly as delicious as when "cooked to the fire"). Much of what is heard on the radio, and much of what people make reference to in daily conversation is part of an ongoing discourse about the land and people's interaction with it. It is through this type of daily conversation that the social and cultural importance of sustaining a relationship with the land became most apparent to me.

The ways in which this relationship is sustained are both complicated and dynamic, and to be able to recognize these ways requires considerable experience in the community. It is very important to the people of Fort McPherson that outsiders gain some awareness of this relationship and do not make careless assumptions. For example, several days after asking an elder if she would consider giving me Gwich'in language lessons in June of 2000, Robert Wishart and I visited her at her home in Fort McPherson. I was hoping to set up a time for my first lesson, and hoping that she still had time in her busy schedule. After giving us tea and offering us some food, she spoke to us about how Gwich'in people were different from other Native people because of what was important

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[2] As Mr. Colins mentions the level of the river fluctuated greatly that summer, and there were very few fish until later in the season, but I am not sure why he says that el Niño means "keep quiet."

to them. She said that the Gwich'in were not like the Indians down around Dawson, for example, because Gwich'in people do not "drum dance" or other things like that. She said that they do not drum dance anymore because "a minister came and told them it was not good." She said that "the Gwich'in don't have things like other Indian people, but we are Indian, we have other things." She said that they have to teach young people about sacred places for gathering things or for visiting, places like Shiltee[3] and Rock River[4].

I have interpreted this to mean several things. First, it seemed that this elder wanted me to understand that if I wanted to learn about the Gwich'in language I had to be somewhat aware of what being Gwich'in was about. Second, it highlighted the importance of being able to go out on the land, for gathering things from places known to be sacred, or for simply going to these and other places. This conversation took place midway through my 2000 field season, and was certainly not the first time that this subject was discussed for my benefit. It has taken me quite some time to realize how much, but not yet exactly how much, I learned by listening to people speak about their lives and the lives of others. This is what was important in the way that people used forest resources, the social relations and the history of the area. In chapter four I present past and present examples of Gwich'in "forestry" that are heavily referenced to community and history.

Messages like this one about what is important to the Gwich'in affected our team's research because it included the idea that the best way for us to learn about the

---

[3] Shiltee Rock is a place where two boys were turned to stone after their sister lifted her menstruation hood to watch them return to camp with an abundance of meat. Shiltee means "sitting in fear" (related to Ethel Stewart by Sarah Simon, Stewart 1955:124).

[4] She was referring to a hill within walking distance of where the Dempster Highway crosses Rock River, in the Yukon Territory, where red ochre can be found. It is general practice to leave a small offering (like matches, rifle shells, coins, or cigarettes) in return for taking red ochre.

land was to spend time on the land with people. By making trips on the river to map out forest use sites, we were told many stories about events, people, and places, "old-time stories," and accounts of how the land has changed in specific places. Andie Palmer writes that "considering narrative without also taking its situation in discourse into account is to decontextualize it, thereby losing some of its associated meaning" (in press:12). She goes on to say that in hunter-gatherer societies it is useful to take into account the presentation of narrative as "situated on the land, and in relation to particular historical and world knowledge" (*ibid.*).

> One of the reasons for using participant observation in hunting and gathering contexts as a methodological approach is that it is an effective way of investigating what might otherwise be overlooked, not because a story could not be told in another context, but because it may more likely be remembered in a context which contains natural features, places, animals, plants or activities associated with the story. Grounded in past oral tradition and vital to the transmission of cultural knowledge, Shuswap place names and narratives told in travel past specific sites form an oral map of the landscape and its resources, mooring remembrance and ideology to place. [Palmer in press:30]

While Palmer is referring specifically to her experiences with Shuswap people in the interior of British Columbia, I believe that the Gwich'in landscape is important in similar ways. After having conversations like the one mentioned above with several people it became clear that participant observation, or spending time on the land with people, is considered by many Gwich'in to be the appropriate way to learn about Gwich'in life and culture. The relationship between this method, and the fact that it was in many respects chosen for me by the people that I spent time with, has immense implications for what I learned regarding Gwich'in ideas about sustainability. Or rather, as I explain in chapter five, Gwich'in ideas about their cultural landscape that contain a different notion of what

non-Gwich'in refer to as sustainability, as a key concept in the formation of the forestry project.

1.2 Fort McPherson

As a member of the team of anthropology students involved in the forestry project, I spent a total of four months over two years, staying with a Gwich'in family from the community of Fort McPherson, in the Northwest Territories. Fort McPherson is a small, predominantly Gwich'in town located in the easternmost part of Gwich'in territory, just past the border of the Yukon, in the Northwest Territories.

> The Peel River Kutchin Indians are an Athapaskan-speaking people living on both sides of the Arctic Circle in the drainage of the Peel River, a tributary of the Mackenzie River, in the Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories of Canada....Kutchin Territory has not varied appreciably since earliest White contact. It extends westward over 600 air-miles from the Mackenzie River Delta to the upper reaches if the Koyakuk River in Alaska. In the northwest it reaches Brooks Range in Alaska, and in the northeast, following the northern limit of the trees, extends to within a hundred miles of the Arctic Ocean. Two hundred and fifty miles to the south, the 65th parallel of latitude marks its approximate southern boundary... [Slobodin 1962:7]

The Gwich'in of Fort McPherson, often referred to as Peel River Gwich'in in the literature, refer to themselves as Tetlit Gwich'in. According to the Gwich'in dictionary (Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute 1999:116), "*teetl'it*" translates as "in the middle," and "*gwich'in*" as people. Cornelius Osgood elaborates this by pointing out that the word "Kutchin" is an "Athapaskan linguistic element meaning "one who dwells," which, coupled with a designation, generally geographical, serves to indicate a specific tribal unit" (1970:13). The dictionary reports that "*teetl'it*" is also coupled with "*gwinjik*" (river) to denote "in the middle river," and also "*teetl'it zheh*" for the town of Fort McPherson, "in the middle house."

The population of Fort McPherson is approximately 700, and this consists almost entirely of people who call themselves Tetlit Gwich'in[5]. Other than temporary police, teachers and nurses there are very few non-Gwich'in living in Fort McPherson. It is a small and friendly town with two stores, two gas stations, one church, one school, and several community and recreational buildings. Most community buildings in the town are named after elders who are somehow associated with the buildings. The roads in McPherson are not paved, everything is well within walking distance, and within two days of my being in Fort McPherson many people knew that I was going to be staying with a couple down at the ferry crossing.

The Gwich'in Land Claim agreement was signed in 1992, making the Gwich'in of Fort McPherson, Aklavik, Inuvik and Tsiigehtchic "beneficiaries" of the Land Claim Agreement.

> On April 22, 1992 the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement was signed by the Gwich'in Tribal Council, the Canadian Government and the Government of the North West Territories. This agreement then was enforced by the passing of the Gwich'in Land Claim Settlement Act on December 22, 1992. This land claim created a 56, 935 square kilometer area in the North West Territories which includes the lower Mackenzie River, part of the Peel River and the Arctic Red River watershed called the Gwich'in Settlement area. [Anderson 2000:2]

Beneficiaries of the Land Claim Agreement have the right to carry out subsistence activities in the Gwich'in Settlement Area (Gwich'in Land Administration, information pamphlet). The legal term "subsistence," is somewhat misleading in regards to the activities that it is used to describe. Fikret Berkes, *et al.*, point out that for groups found in the north, hunting, as part of a system of ethics and conduct, "involves a great deal more than the material aspect of life; subsistence embodies cultural perspectives of

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[5] Indian and Northern Affairs Canada reports that the total registered population of Tetlit Gwich'in is 1262 (INAC 2001:3). Several hundred Tetlit Gwich'in live in Inuvik.

relationships to places, people and animals" (1994:358). This legal term encompasses a wide array of activities (including hunting), events and relationships, that are integral to life in Fort McPherson. It is a cultural relationship to the land as well as an economic and material relationship that continues to be important to the community of Fort McPherson.

1.3 Eight Miles

During my time in Fort McPherson I stayed with Thomas and Eileen Koe and their family at their summer fish camp at a place locally referred to as Eight Miles. Eight Miles is located eight miles, by river, from the initial location of the fort which was later moved to its present location because of flooding. It is about 11 kilometers south of Fort McPherson by road, and is also where the Dempster Highway crosses the Peel River by means of a ferry during the open water season, and an ice bridge during the winter months (see Appendix, Photograph 1). Several people have fish camps around this area, as it is convenient to get to, family members can visit often by vehicle, and there are good eddies for fishing that have been created by the ferry landings (see Appendix, Photograph 2). The community at Eight Miles has been growing since the late 1970's when the Dempster Highway was built through the area. Before that time there were several camps in the area located at various distances up and down the river from Eight Mile Creek. The community at Eight Miles consists of quite a few camps. No less than ten were occupied on and off during my stay there. When intensive social activities such as bingos, meetings, weddings, funerals or other important events were held in Fort McPherson, life at Eight Miles would often slow down for a while. In the summer time people with camps

at Eight Miles are engaged in fishing, processing fish, locally called "working with fish," and supplying smokehouses with wood.

Eight Miles is quite an exciting place as a great deal of activity takes place there. Its location, at the intersection of the Peel River and the Dempster Highway makes for constant activity, especially in the summer months when the twenty-four hour sunlight means that people can head up to the mountains, or out on the river at nearly any time (depending on other conditions of course, like heat, rain, or mosquito populations *etc.*). Between June and the beginning of August, and according to my experience, the weather has included hot, dry, weather (which does not cool down much at "night" time) to days on end of heavy rain, and even snow at the higher elevations, found just a few kilometers up the highway. From spring breakup through the whole of the summer there can be considerable variation in the level of the river. Despite all of this, people manage to get a good deal of fishing done, with their nets set near the ferry landing, to make dry fish and summer meals, and dog food. So most people at Eight Miles, the Koes included, spend a great deal of time checking nets and working with fish, but there is also quite a bit of time for relaxing and visiting with people staying at Eight Miles or those passing through as all traffic to and from Fort McPherson and Inuvik must take the Dempster Highway.

Many people in Fort McPherson, including those staying at Eight Miles, drive south on the Dempster for about an hour, to James Creek to collect their drinking water. Other regular activity on the Dempster includes berry picking and hunting expeditions, semi-trucks bringing goods for the two stores in McPherson and the others in Inuvik, people heading to southern destinations, tourists, and people just going for a ride along the highway.

The summer time in the area is also the only season in which any noticeable number of outsiders visit the area, usually as tourists. While most tourists bypass Fort McPherson completely, preferring to continue on to Inuvik, all tourists must pass directly through Eight Miles, by river or by road. The occasional tourist will venture into a camp with the hope of buying fish.

In 1999 there were two canteens at Eight Miles, one on each side of the river. One was "traditional," set up for tourists waiting for the ferry. It served "bush food," usually fish, berries, tea and bannock. The other canteen serves burgers, fries, and pizza and is popular with tourists as well as local people. Boats are also kept at Eight Miles in the summer time as the shore below McPherson is not appropriate for docking boats and in the summer time most people traveling by boat, and float planes leave from Eight Miles.

Staying with the Koes at Eight Miles was an ideal situation for me to be in, to learn about Gwich'in life and to learn about the importance of carrying out locally meaningful research. Although much has been written about the possible present and future implications of sustainability, spending time at Eight Miles offered me the opportunity to understand how Gwich'in communities are sustained, and the place of the land in this process of sustenance. The concept of sustainability may be usefully used in other analytical frameworks, designed with other goals in mind; however, as I intend to illustrate in this thesis, the unexamined use of this concept in ways that will affect the Gwich'in community in a long term and intensive manner, is not reflected in, or relevant to current anthropological work, and nor does it represent Gwich'in world view, goals or concerns. However, as I have learned while examining some of my field work experiences, the concept of sustainability is useful when it is used to facilitate cross-

cultural understandings of different values. Although the concept of sustainability as it is commonly used in connection to sustainable resource use may not accommodate the entire complex of Gwich'in perspectives on their relationship with the land, the examination of Gwich'in perspectives on this concept is important not only for the creation of long term management plans for Gwich'in lands, but also for illuminating the potential value of an enhanced awareness of cross-cultural communication. In the next chapter I discuss the research methodology and theoretical framework with which I have approached the cross-cultural communication of perspective.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will theoretically inform the methodology that I used during my time in Fort McPherson. I introduce my research methodology as it pertains to oral history and begin my discussion of the relationship between language and culture by examining a selection of anthropological ideas about the discursive construction of meaning.

Our research team carried out both oral historical work in the community of Fort McPherson and research into relevant archival material in order to learn about the history of the industrial use of the forests. We carried out a series of formal interviews, but generally we spoke with and spent time with people in an informal manner (informal from my point of view). Of the examples that I provide in this thesis, only the transcribed section in chapter four is the result of an audio recording (as well as the excerpts from the Mr. Colin's radio show in chapter one). The transcribed section is taken from a series of interviews that our research team carried out with Neil Colin. We were initially supposed to spend time out on the delta with Neil but community events and time constraints made the idea of holding interviews in Fort McPherson seem appealing to Neil and our team of researchers.

The set price for Elder's fees and interviews in Fort McPherson and the surrounding area is high ($100 per day) as the result of the high prices for hourly work established by the petroleum industry. While our research team was able to pay various people as guides for taking us out on the land on several occasions as we had hoped to do

with Neil Colin, we otherwise spent time speaking with people at their convenience and surrounding daily activities. It was often assumed by some people in Fort McPherson that Thomas and Eileen Koe were receiving payment for providing our research team with a place to stay, and for the time they spent with us; however, this was not the case. Eileen explained to me that she does not approve of the system that has been established by which people receive payment in exchange for information. As a result, my methodology was influenced by Eileen and the other Gwich'in people who encouraged our team of researchers to learn about Gwich'in uses of forest resources by spending time with people out on the land. I spent most of my time around the Eight Miles area, visiting and talking with people, and listening to stories about their lives. Many people were friendly and eager to share both personal experiences and to talk about the Gwich'in way of life in general. Throughout this thesis I identify only those people who have given me verbal consent to use their names. Others who participated by speaking with me and spending time with me, and from whom I did not receive express consent to identify are left anonymous or, for example, referred to as an "elder."

As I anticipated when I applied for clearance from the Department of Anthropology Ethics Advisory Group to observe and record Gwich'in discursive practices, much of the speech, or rather, conversation that I have recorded in my field notes was directly influenced by my participation in the forestry project. Obviously, this has strongly influenced my decision to focus on the relationship between ideas about sustainability as represented by our forestry project and the concerns and perspectives of those Gwich'in with whom I spoke.

Over my two field seasons, I traveled by boat up the Peel River and down into the Mackenzie Delta, and by truck into the Richardson Mountains with several different people. During these trips and also during my time at Eight Miles I participated in conversations that began during my first trip to Fort McPherson and have continued well beyond the four months that I have spent as a researcher. These conversations have been the source of a great deal of information concerning the history of activities that have affected the forest resources in the area, but more importantly, and as was intended by the people that I spent time with, these conversations provided me with valuable opportunities to learn about Gwich'in perspectives.

2.2 Research Methodology: Oral History

Julie Cruikshank writes that the stories that people tell about their lives, and the ways or materials that they use to do this make up an "oral tradition," while the term "oral history" refers to the research method that focuses on such narratives (1994:404). Oral historians do not collect reflections of past, or present events but rather they observe the transmission of social perception (Briggs 1986:13). The narratives that were shared with me included information that could be extracted and labeled as information specifically concerning the use of forest resources. However, such information is heavily contextualized with reference to community and history. Oral history, as a research methodology, is based on recognizing the value of this type of discourse which illuminates connections between people and places. It is through this heavily contextualized discourse that local meanings emerge and so it follows that the process of sustaining the Gwich'in landscape, which I will explore in the following chapters, is also heavily contextualized with reference to people and places.

Cruikshank writes that as a research methodology, collaborative life story work "often seems to move us away from questions about social structure and social behavior and toward questions of symbol and meaning" (1993:137). As she points out, anthropologists, as people who are interested in ideas about culture, are necessarily drawn to the stories that people tell about themselves (1998:1). She writes that underlying connections are established by narratives and these same connections are what anthropologists examine as culture:

> One concept that anthropologists use to frame these connections is culture, defined as a uniquely human creation central to everyday lives and practices of all human communities and characterized by our capacity to endow the world with symbolic meanings. Inevitably, this approach draws us to stories people tell about themselves. [Cruikshank 1998:1]

The concept of underlying connections is enhanced by a consideration of meaning, interpretation and audience. Oral history is a methodology that takes into account the complex relationships between the individual, society and culture as well as history and place, that are featured in the stories that people tell about themselves.

> By looking at the ways people use the traditional dimension of culture as a resource to talk about the past, we may be able to see life history as contributing to explanations of cultural process rather than as simply illustrating or supplementing ethnographic description. [Cruikshank 1990:1]

In my experience in Fort McPherson, a great deal of talk concerned with the transmission of cultural perception is provided in the form of personal narratives. Cruikshank simply reminds us that these narratives are part of, and draw on what can be labeled as an oral tradition (1994:404) therefore drawing attention to ways in which these personal narratives are situated with reference to various other narratives. My methodology consisted of staying with a Gwich'in elder couple and their family "on the land," and as part of a small community oriented towards fishing.

Our research team was also strongly discouraged, in casual conversation, from attempting to elicit information in the form of questionnaires, or other rigidly structured communications regarding our interests in Gwich'in forestry practices. In general, we were advised to stay clear of any situation where, in Cruikshank's words, "one of the participants claims the right to both pose the questions and interpret the responses" (1998:25). Rather, in my experience, learning about practices that are part of the larger system of Gwich'in interaction with the land is best done by participant observation; spending time on the land with people. More specifically, this involved observing and participating to varying degrees in the range of activities that make up life around camp, *i.e.*, fishing, making dry fish, gathering wood, picking berries, building cabins, taking care of dogs and of course many other things. While I slowly caught on to how certain things were done, and was able to contribute in small ways, the participation part of my particular participant-observation based methodology came to include participating in conversations with Eileen Koe at certain times that usually centered around certain, key activities. These activities included talking to Eileen while she worked with fish, traveling by boat or by vehicle, and especially visiting places out on the land like old camp sites, and berry patches. Our conversations over the last four years have not been exclusive, as several other elders have participated in ways that can be seen to contribute to Eileen's perspectives on the Gwich'in way of life.

Returning to the community over several years has been vital to filling out my understandings of the perspectives that have been shared with me as a researcher. For example there have often been times when Eileen has referred back to previous conversations, in response to something relevant at another time, saying "Look,

remember when I told you about ..." Such occasions are crucial not only in terms of verification, but rather as illuminating important connections between narratives in ways that I would likely have missed.

While working on this thesis I had the opportunity to return to Fort McPherson to work on a different, although related resource management project. This provided me with an opportunity to discuss with Eileen, in some detail, the direction that this thesis might take. Eileen suggested that the way to proceed was to recognize, and to be respectful, of how I learned about the Gwich'in way of life. In the final chapter of this thesis I explore the importance of berry picking as an example of how the land and the community are understood by those Gwich'in who participated in the forestry project, to sustain each other, and the significance of such an example as I have examined it, as a Gwich'in response to specific research questions. The importance of this example was not obvious to me until I gave thought to Eileen's advice, to recognize how I was shown about the Gwich'in way of life.

As this forestry project was based on cross-cultural research, I have drawn on diverse areas of contemporary anthropological work, not as much to be able to interpret what I have learned, as to recognize the complexities involved in cross-cultural research. In particular, an examination of the anthropological concept of the speech community can shed light onto the basic structure of cross-cultural work. The analysis of "sustainable forestry" in a Gwich'in community involves the use of concepts that draw meaning from their position in a particular framework that can be characterized as foreign to Gwich'in culture. To begin to understand how, or even if, this framework might be commensurable with Gwich'in systems of meaning it is important to first recognize that there are

complex cultural, social and linguistic factors to be considered. These factors are partially addressed with the concept of the speech community, and related ideas about the cultural construction of landscape, to be explored below.

2.3 The Concept of the Speech Community

In order to discover the local activation of potential meaning in cultural categories, it is necessary to understand how they are formed, communicated and influenced by the language used to discuss them. Recognizing the difference and the relationship between the speech community and the language community, is therefore helpful to understanding what people are saying and how. The speech community is a valuable concept when used as a tool for anthropological study, as it encourages "recognition of the complex interplay between language as a human resource and language as a historical product and process" (Duranti 1997a:83).

Definitions of speech community range from those based on social contact, *i.e.*, "groups held together by frequency of social interactions patterns and set off from the surrounding areas by weaknesses in the lines of communication" (Gumperz 1962 :29, quoted in Duranti 1997a:81), to definitions based on self-perception. That is, "a speech community is made up of people who *regard themselves* as speaking the same language; it need have no other defining attributes" (Corder 1973:53, quoted in Duranti 1997a:81). The concept of "speech community" must be considered with respect to a related concept, the "language community." A more specific concept than that of speech community, a language community is commonly defined by the use of a shared

denotational code (Silverstein 1996:126). While working towards a definition of the concept of speech community, Michael Silverstein writes,

> It should be obvious that allegiance to – in this special sense "sharing of" – denotational norms is hardly to the point in what we have termed *the speech community*. It is, of course, such speech communities that are social formations of the same general order of phenomenon as have otherwise interested social scientists, since they are defined in terms of socio-actional regularities that may involve anything from no "shared" denotational codes to many "shared" denotational codes. [Silverstein 1996:129]

Silverstein suggests that speech communities consist of speakers who may use one or several languages, but use such languages to index cultural features that are recognizable to other speakers of that community, in any number of languages (1998a:409). For example, Regna Darnell writes that "the grounding of political action and traditional transmission of knowledge in personal narrative is only incidentally dependent on the language in which it is expressed" (1993:94).While Darnell points out that Cree use of English does not make use of the English forms of constructing arguments or conversations, and that "words used in English were glosses for Cree concepts not expressible in Standard English" (*ibid.*:84), the use of English by the Cree indexes the cultural and historical processes that have resulted in the use of a shared language.

As Silverstein writes, in investigating the "causes and consequences of contact of local language communities with forces of the wider polities in which they have become incorporated," (1998a:401) global language communities such as the English, Spanish, or Hebrew language communities for example can be contrasted with "local" language communities.

> In relation to such global and national language communities, language communities are thus "local" only to the extent that within a group of communicating people there is a process that produces a contrastive and positive sense of their participation in their own language community. "Locality" of

> language community is only a relationally produced state in a cultural-ideological order. [Silverstein 1998a:404]

Silverstein points out that the complex relationship between the speech community and language community over time is of central importance to the study of the relationship between language and culture in North America as during the last 500 years of contact in North America, as there have been "profound and reciprocal transformations both of denotational codes ("languages") and of the social organizational matrices in which these function" (1996:129).

The Gwich'in people with whom I spent time consisted mainly of elders and their children and grandchildren. These elders were raised, to differing degrees, by their parents and grandparents on the land. For most, their first language is Gwich'in. Elders speak more Gwich'in and also switch back and forth between English and Gwich'in more often than members of younger generations. By looking at "speaking as an activity with sociohistorical depth," (Duranti 1997a:329) it is possible to recognize that elders who speak in such a pattern are doing so, in part, as a result of complex social and historical events that have taken place, and continue to take place in their community. As with many First Nations' languages, there have been borrowings from the languages of the fur trade and there continue to be borrowings from these languages and possibly others, stimulated by the movement of people into and out of the community.

For example, in Fort McPherson and other Gwich'in communities, weddings, funerals, anniversaries, and other important events are usually marked by holding community feasts. At these feasts it is elders who make speeches and the audience consists of many people, not all of whom can fully or even partially understand the

elder's words. The themes and details of these public speeches are the result of a larger collaboration and a larger set of norms. Who talks and about what is part of the "patterns of indexical facts of linguistic usage-in-context…of who, normatively, communicates in which ways to whom on what occasions," the speech community (Silverstein 1996:129).

Speech communities consist of speakers who may use one or several languages, but use such languages to index cultural features that other speakers of that community may recognize. Such features include ideas about the construction and transmission of social meaning. Social meaning is derived from context, the relationship between what is said and from where it draws meaning. This relationship is the result of an ongoing process rather than a dichotomization of text and contextualization variables at any given time (Briggs 1986:25). In order to add depth to my discussion of anthropological work on landscape, I will first continue to explore the creation and use of context in terms of the pragmatic use of language, that is to consider the meaning of language in use, relative to the indexical orders that are referenced discursively.

2.4 Context

The construction of "texts," or the discourse that becomes the subject of oral historical research, can be broken down in order to further elaborate on the interaction in which such processes emerge. Key to the oral history methodology used here is the notion that the researcher is an active participant who at the same time does not constitute the entire possible audience. Collaboration, or the negotiation of life stories is based on the idea that the production of coherent narratives require shared understandings. What these understandings draw upon, or consist of can be labeled as context. Alessandro

Duranti and Charles Goodwin point out that the difficulty in the analysis of context lies in "describing the socio-historical knowledge that a participant employs to act within the environment of the moment" (1992:5) and that it is of crucial importance to "take as a point of departure for analysis of context the perspective of the participants whose behavior is being analyzed" (1992:4). One way in which the socio-historical knowledge that people employ can be described, is by addressing cultural ideas about space and time, and place and history and how such ideas contribute to the frameworks in which coherence is achieved. Coherence is a socially negotiated property of texts, as Charlotte Linde writes, "it is derived from the relations that the parts of a text bear to one another, and to the whole text, as well as from the relation that the text bears to other texts of its type" (1993:12).

Silverstein and Urban suggest that anthropologists should study texts ethnographically, as "metadiscursive constructs" that represent entextualization as it results from "actual cultural practices" (1996:2). Silverstein and Urban recognize that text and discursive process are related, in that they are both "hinged on ideologies of discourse" (Fenigsen 1998:751). Such discursive processes both arise out of, and result in contextualization.

> The point is that social life as *interactions* that constantly call up culture (and its deployability or realization in them) and reinvest it with their historicity, is the object of this wider construal of 'contextualization'. [Silverstein 1992:57]

The subject of oral history is a dialogue between past and present (Briggs 1986:14), and also other cultural features to which meaning is variously ascribed. Looking at social life as interaction is especially applicable to learning about how Gwich'in social relations and practices are indexed discursively. Speaking with people about the Gwich'in way of life,

and listening to stories about peoples' lives provided a point of access to cultural information that lies as much in the content, as in the way that it was told, as such ways represent choices that were made and such choices can be understood to index cultural information.

Cultural ideas about place and history and the cultural practices through which they continue, constitute context for oral historical information that is included in, as well as constitutes life stories. Linde points out that there are many different types of coherence systems in her culture alone but instead of looking at each one as fundamentally new and different creations she suggests that although every narrative is the creation of all participants involved, this includes those other than just the speaker and the listener, "they have a cultural supply of expected events in a life course, commonly recognized causes, and shared possible explanations from which to construct individual coherences" (1993:19). The Gwich'in landscape is built out of stories from the past that have been passed on as the landscape becomes meaningful to younger generations. These stories, as they are anchored in features of the land, are often the result of discursive processes of previous generations.

While Eileen does not consider herself to be an expert of plants and their properties, she told me about several different types of plants that she had learned about from her elders because I had expressed interest in learning about the Gwich'in uses of plants. While walking around some of the river banks in the Mouth of the Peel area to set rabbit snares, or to look for signs of moose, Eileen would point out many plants that she had learned about from her elders. Every time she pointed out such a plant she would describe what it was used for, by whom, and how successful she understood it to be. The

information that Eileen shared with me about these plants was entwined with detailed social and historical information. She explained that certain people are more knowledgeable about these plants, how to use them, and where to find them and told me that I should speak to these people. Eileen was pointing to the fact that certain people are understood to have knowledge of different aspects of the land, and that this knowledge is tied into the peoples' lives. By acknowledging those who she considers to be more experienced, Eileen was being respectful in a way that is very common in Fort McPherson. While Eileen often shared her knowledge of plant use with me, she always prefaced it with descriptions of where, and from whom, she learned.

Listening to Eileen and others speak about these features of the land, in travel, in camp, and in town, leads me to assume that Gwich'in coherence systems and the frameworks through which they are perceived involves the perceptions of preceding generations, as these perceptions can be seen as the base for communication that assigns meaning to the landscape. Therefore these perceptions continue to be important as they are linked to the land, as part of the social landscape, through discursive processes. The messages of narratives from the past are intricately linked to the coherence of present day narratives in a way that illuminates the role of the land in cultural understandings and corresponding social activities.

Ideas about meaning necessarily involve ideas about context and audience. The concept of audience is fundamental to life history work because as Hensel (1996:3) and Duranti (1986:239) have pointed out, communication (which implies coherence, and therefore meaning) is negotiated, or "achieved." This clearly recognizes the limitations of

focusing only on the intention of the speaker and the assumed meanings created by such intentions. As Duranti writes:

> In particular, we need a theory of pragmatics that would recognize not only the speaker's knowledge, needs and wants but also the praxis-producing co-operative work between speaker and hearer in making utterances relevant and meaningful. [Duranti 1992:44]

Duranti, among others, suggests that "the relevance assigned to the speaker's intentions in the interpretation of speech may vary across societies and social contexts" (1992:26), therefore it is important to take into consideration the fact that all things relevant to a situation might not be encoded in the message, that is, in what is said directly, but are available through other means to people familiar with a culture (1993:228).

Donald Brenneis uses the concept of "indirection" to discuss cultural variations in the relationship between meaning, intentionality, and the role of audience (1986:339). He writes about the "complexity of indirect communicative practices and the necessary involvement of an active audience in understanding what is going on" and questions "the possibility of any purely direct speech acts" (*ibid.*:345). The fact that Brenneis approaches meaning and intentionality as separate concepts, that "have become increasingly entangled, with an implicit equation between them often being made" (1986:345) is indicative of an assertion that focusing largely on the speaker, and the speaker's intentions might not be an appropriate way to assess the meaning of a speech act, which is an interaction. Recognizing what a speaker's intentions are is of course important but, as Brenneis shows, the meaning of what is being communicated may be missed if other participant roles in the interaction are not acknowledged.

How events take on meaning, is explained through strategies dealing with action and interpretation that differ cross-culturally (Duranti 1993:227). Understanding how action and agency are explained by speakers is important to understanding why certain events become part of narrative accounts, as well the associated causes and explanations. The meanings of the events, causes and explanations that make up the cultural supply are constructed in interactional processes, and therefore imply the existence of an audience. As Jane Hill and Judith Irvine write, "many aspects of linguistic form may be usefully seen as having interactional processes profoundly embedded in them" (1992:1). Thus the use of linguistic forms serves to index the choices that people have made in terms of what constitutes their life story and what does not, and similarly, to index possible audiences.

2.5 Landscape

In the introduction to this thesis I quoted a Gwich'in elder who told me that Gwich'in people are different from other Native people because of what is important to them. She said that the Gwich'in are not like the Indians down around Dawson, for example, because Gwich'in people do not "drum dance" or other things like that. She said that the Gwich'in "don't have things like other Indian people, but we are Indian, we have other things." She said that they have to teach young people about sacred places for gathering things or for visiting, or for simply knowing about. While such places and meanings are obviously specific to the Gwich'in, the wider cultural process that they represent is not (Hirsch 1995:23). As Andie Palmer writes:

> ..spatially anchored stories reveal a tendency for humans to identify in the land ways to remember, to teach and to learn through their own experiences and those of their friends and ancestors, and to respect the land they live on for what it has to teach. [Palmer in press:254]

The land and its features are important for many complex reasons to the Gwich'in and I have found the concept of "landscape" to be extremely useful in understanding the Gwich'in relationship to the land from an outsider's perspective. This concept has been discussed at length by many anthropologists (*e.g.,* Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995, Feld and Basso 1996, Basso 1990, Palmer in press, Ingold 1986).

Landscapes are inherently cultural as they arise out of the perceptions of people that experience features on the land and then assign meaning to them in order to communicate a myriad of social and cultural phenomena (Wishart 2000:4). Perspective comes from perceptions that become landscape through discursive processes, so essentially landscape cannot exist without the notion of perspective. Edward Casey makes the point that it is far more useful to think about the priority of place over space (1996:19) and I agree that there is a greater use in assuming that local knowledge precedes general knowledge. Much of a person's knowledge of a place comes from directly experiencing and perceiving the features of the place, but much of it also comes from indirectly experiencing a place, or rather experiencing it through communication about the place and extending their local knowledge to cover new or unknown places.

If landscape is culturally constructed and is made meaningful by the people that place social meaning on it, landscape can be understood to emerge as a cultural process (Hirsch 1995:5). Landscape emerges as socially meaningful through the social action of discourse and some local forms of expression are based on the idea that landscape brings culture and social practices into discourse. Crisca Bierwert points out that she works with a group of Coast Salish people who understand power to come from place and proposes a way to approach such an issue that extends from Casey's conceptualization of the

anthropological problematic of space and place.

> If the question is less about the nature of place and whose subjectivity prevails, and more about the kind of attention a place receives, then we can better understand the give and take of interpretation that places have to offer. [Bierwert 1999:43]

I understand Bierwert to be arguing for the significance of local knowledge and local communications of perception. By putting the focus on the attention that places receive, the local knowledge is what creates the grounds for interpretation and paying attention to the associated discourse is the way to understand the relevant local knowledge. Examining discourse is vital to understanding a culture. As Lisa Phillips Valentine writes, "any given discourse is socially situated and fills some function which depends upon the social structure of the society in which the discourse is presented" (Valentine 1995:7.). The approach to discourse as an integrating concept that illuminates the intricate relationships between language, culture, society and the individual (E. Basso 1990:3, Sherzer 1987:295) is an approach that encompasses a great deal of theoretical complexity.

In discourse that represents the relationship between the Gwich'in society and their own culture, the ties to the land are complex and interwoven with talk about many things. On the other hand, in discourse that represents the relationship between Gwich'in and those not familiar with the Gwich'in landscape the social action takes a different form for specific purposes, and is generally incorporated into the need to continually define Gwich'in culture for political and cultural reasons. The ties to the land in this case are simply and overtly stated. For example, on the day that I left Fort McPherson for the first time, Eileen Koe told me that I should go home and tell my family and friends that

"the Gwich'in people are still here," that they are "surviving," and that their "way of life is strong." This type of obvious and direct speech was not like anything I had heard during the previous two months that I had spent with Eileen and her family. During this time I listened to Gwich'in people speak about the land, and the important connection between that land and the Gwich'in way of life, and much of this talk was for my benefit as someone unfamiliar with the Gwich'in way of life, but at the same time was also of a different nature than the final message I received because I was spending time with people "on the land," learning, watching and listening. I think that Eileen chose to speak to me in such a way when I left so that I could pass the message on to other people down south, and she did so in a way that she knew I would be sure to understand, and would easily be able to pass on. Most importantly, she gave me a message that would be meaningful to people "down south."

It was for the best that she ended my time in Fort McPherson in such a straightforward manner because several years later I am still trying to fully comprehend what I have learned. Many of the stories continue to return to me and although they made direct sense at the time, their larger, underlying messages are still haunting me, demanding fuller understanding and explication. She provided me with a message concerning Gwich'in culture that is understandable to a possible, future audience by leaving out references to the complex process by which Gwich'in people experience their culture. One explanation is that she likely did this in response to an awareness that people from other cultures perceive the landscape differently.

Such a simple example has much to say about the nature of Gwich'in/non-Gwich'in communication when examined from a dialogic perspective. Hill and Irvine

point out that there has been a movement towards the use of such an approach in contemporary anthropology, "that shifts away from paradigms assigning the locus of "meaning" to the individual speaker, toward more dialogic approaches in which meanings are constructed in interactional processes (1992:1). Such approaches are "informed by a sense of cultural variability, and ask how such variability may relate to the situated conduct of talk" (*ibid.*). This type of approach is well suited to describing examples such as the one above, in which a message was passed on to me from a Gwich'in elder. I initially assumed that the message was a simplified version of a more complex set of ideas, which could be possible. However, approaches such as the one referred to by Hill and Irvine indicate that it may be more useful to understand all interactions as consisting of a combination of commonly used discursive processes, thereby recognizing complexity and allowing for a fuller appreciation of the nature of communication.

In considering the message that Eileen passed on to me, it is important to keep in mind that this message was part of a larger discussion of survival, and concern about portraying survival to non-Gwich'in audiences. Such a strategy involves the use of both non-Gwich'in and Gwich'in understandings to communicate with a non-Gwich'in audience. Elizabeth Furniss points out that there is a great deal of diversity in the individual strategies that Aboriginal people use to communicate with non-Aboriginal audiences (1999:195). That people may use different strategies in order to effectively communicate with certain types of audiences is important to any researcher who deals with native sources of information verbally (Bauman 1992:196). Cruikshank writes about the importance of recognizing communication as social action, in particular about the

telling of traditional and personal stories as ways of communicating across cultures. She writes that we have to understand what stories say, and why they are told, "unless we pay attention to why a particular story is selected and told, we understand very little of its meanings" (1998:41).

In addition to Eileen's comments about Gwich'in culture, messages of cultural strength and survival are often heard on the local radio station as part of speeches and commentaries made by individuals who hold positions on community councils and organizations, or who simply want to address the entire community and these speeches seem to be made regardless of whether or not an outside audience is expected. So while I have made the assumption that discussions of cultural survival usually involve outside participants, it seems that this subject is often part of discussions that directly involve only local people. This suggests that Eileen's message is part of a certain type of talk that is used between those from outside and inside the community, but likely towards the same ends.

In an examination of the strategic use of certain metaphors by the James Bay Cree, Harvey Feit describes the significance of the use of non-Cree ideas in order to communicate the importance of the Cree landscape to those that the are known to recognize a different cultural landscape.

> By joining meanings from both cultures, Cree elders show that we can understand representations of environment most effectively at the intersection of cultures, but that we have to attend to the histories and uses of political and discursive strategies. [Feit 2001:445]

Eileen's message of survival represents a similar discursive strategy in that she adopted a certain strategy in order to put forward a Gwich'in message, and at the same time she has created a cross-cultural "intersection." Her message does not reflect any negative cultural

processes by which the Gwich'in have become less Gwich'in. Rather by acknowledging that Gwich'in discursive strategies have historical and political dimensions to them, her message can be understood to reflect the ways in which communication between Gwich'in and non-Gwich'in is known to have been successful in the past. For historical and political reasons, narratives of survival by Gwich'in people resonate with non-Gwich'in audiences and provide an "intersection" for bringing together different representations of interaction with environment. The cross-cultural success of such a message has immense implications at a time when concerns about the sustainability of resource use are rising and in particular, has implications for the forest management project in which Eileen had been participating both before and after relating a message of survival.

In taking Cruikshank's and Feit's advice to question why stories are told, and why and how certain strategies are used, this message can be at least partially understood as a response to our forestry project and research questions. Eileen Koe suggested that the way to proceed with this thesis was to recognize, and to be respectful, of how I learned about the Gwich'in way of life. I understand the selection of ideas that I have presented in this chapter to be concerned with the communication of perspective, and in particular with the communication of perspective across cultures. I have found the concept of speech community to be useful in addressing the complexities of cross-cultural research, in particular some of the issues that should be taken into consideration by researchers in North America, as indicated by Silverstein (1996:129).The concept of speech community, and the anthropological concept of landscape are both key to my

understanding of the communication of perspective, and therefore to the ways in which I have interpreted what, and how, I learned about the Gwich'in way of life.

In response to Eileen's message of survival, and request that I tell people down south that the Gwich'in are surviving, I have attempted to restructure my focus on forest resources to one which allows responses that account for Gwich'in perspectives. This has mainly involved a change in focus from concern about the sustainability of resources, and of resource use, to a concern about the sustenance of culture and community as they sustain the land.

In summary, understanding how I learned about the Gwich'in way of life in order to contribute to the forestry management project, as suggested by Eileen Koe, requires that I recognize the intricate nature of cross-cultural research, and some of the issues that are necessarily involved. In the following chapter I discuss the representation of Gwich'in women in the ethnographic literature, and conclude with a comparison of a contemporary Gwich'in fish camp and an earlier ethnographic description, in order to highlight the value of a focus on interaction and communication to the forestry project, as it was concerned with local perspectives. In the final two chapters I present information gathered in response to a question generated in a specific cultural framework, specifically about Gwich'in "forestry," and I explore the importance of berry picking as an example of how the land and the community are understood to sustain each other, and the significance of such an example, when examined as a Gwich'in response to specific research questions.

Chapter Three

Finding Gaps in the Literature

"Who do they think made all those fancy beaded clothes they all talked about, the men?"
Eileen Koe, August 10, 2001

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses a request that Eileen Koe made of me. She asked that my thesis broaden the general representation of Gwich'in women's contributions to Gwich'in culture, and in the transmission of Gwich'in culture. Eileen is familiar with the key ethnographic works written about her community and finds the orientation that many of these works take to be frustrating. Once, while she was looking through a book written about the importance of elders in First Nations communities that she seemed to otherwise enjoy, she voiced disappointment with its orientation to a European perspective. She said "they always start with the white people," referring to a description of a Gwich'in community that is prefaced by a history of Native/non-Native contact. Such a matter of orientation is also responsible for the omission of Gwich'in women's contributions to Gwich'in interaction with the land and with Gwich'in culture as a whole. This specific lack of information has also been pointed out to me by David Anderson and Robert Wishart (in personal communications), who are familiar with the ethnographic and anthropological literature of the area.

In order to address the discrepancies that have been pointed out to me concerning the representation of Gwich'in women, I have divided this chapter into four sections. The first part specifically summarizes the theoretical orientation and the resulting information concerning Gwich'in women that was presented in the two major ethnographic works

that have focused on the Tetlit Gwich'in. The second part, as a response to the first, is a review of current theoretical perspectives on the relationship between language and culture. While focusing on the discursive nature of gender relations, this review continues my discussion of communication. In the third part I draw from a larger body of literature that identifies kinship, rather than gender, as a more comprehensive theoretical orientation to social organization in Gwich'in society. Finally, I conclude with a comparison of some aspects of a contemporary Gwich'in fish camp and an earlier ethnographic description of fish camps in order to illustrate how a focus on interaction and communication is valuable to a project that is interested in the importance of local perspectives.

3.2 Ethnographic Perspectives on the Tetlit Gwich'in

The most comprehensive ethnographic works concerning the Tetlit Gwich'in are based on field work done by Cornelius Osgood and Richard Slobodin more than fifty years ago. Richard Slobodin's 1962 work "Band Organization of the Peel River Gwich'in" is based on field research done in 1938-39 and 1946-47 (1962:5), and Cornelius Osgood's 1970 (orig. 1936) work "Contributions to the Ethnography of the Kutchin" is based on research done in 1932 (1970:3). While these ethnographies do not explicitly address anthropological or Gwich'in models of gender relations, they do, of course, reflect theoretical perspectives that are based on the authors' underlying cultural assumptions about social organization.

Cornelius Osgood was concerned with creating an ethnography of Gwich'in culture for the period immediately prior to European contact. His ethnography is intended

to be a purely descriptive documentation of the historic period rather than an analytical interpretation, in order to provide a background which he considers necessary "for a logical continuation of cultural studies based on the Northern Athabaskan tribes – and one which, if to be supplied at all, must be recorded immediately lest the attempt at reconstruction become wholly futile" (1970:21). He concludes with a brief analysis of the nature of social change and writes that "the whole aboriginal pattern of social organization is vestigial among the Kutchin" (*ibid.*:171). Osgood refers to the acculturation of the Gwich'in as extensive and beyond the scope of his immediate purpose (*ibid.*:170). Michael Asch writes that the acculturation model of post-contact culture change of Native people, such as that assumed by Osgood, "rests on the premise that when Native people with the type of adaptation and social organization of the Dene and Inuit come into contact with complex western society, they tend to evolve slowly but inexorably toward the more complex form" (1981:5). Even though Osgood identified the acculturation of the Gwich'in as extensive, he also noted that "there has been a tremendous upheaval, but at the same time there remains a whole psychological outlook which is intensely native" (*ibid.*:171).

Osgood provides a summary of European explorer's opinions on the position of Gwich'in women, which are probably more indicative of European notions of women's roles than they are realistic interpretations of Gwich'in gender relations and Osgood agrees with this, convinced that such viewpoints are exaggerations. He quotes directly from these explorers, "Hardisty calls the Kutchin women 'literally beasts of burden to their lords and masters,' and Jones states that 'the treatment of women by their husbands is very bad; they are, in fact, little better than slaves' " (Osgood 1970:131). Osgood

concludes that "in short, I see the woman's lot as a hard one, but not so because of any essential feeling of controlling superiority on the part of the male population" (1970:132). He points out that "appearances deceive the casual onlooker" who might see a woman carrying a pack as a sign of slavery rather than knowing that she is "accepting it as her just share of the labour" while her husband might walk many times as far through more difficult terrain, but carrying only a gun (*ibid.*:112). Although he does not go into detail on this topic, such an observation would have nicely introduced a description of the interaction of hunting and gathering, or of hunting and the concomitant activities of processing and distribution.

Osgood does not make many observations on the contributions that Gwich'in women make to Gwich'in life in terms of activities like hunting and fishing. He makes use of a public space/private space type of dichotomy but does not pursue the organization of the private space, where he finds the women to be.

> Another factor of the greatest significance is the very definite recognition of the woman's authority in the home. Men feel that the outside world is theirs, that they have the superiority of masculine strength particularly as contrasted to the inevitable periodic weaknesses of the opposite sex which are very great in their effect psychologically, if not physically. [Osgood 1970:113]

While he suggests this type of dichotomy, Osgood mentions later that women were known to influence male chiefs, again hinting at social interaction, but not pursuing the intricacies of such interaction any farther.

> The paternalistic role of the chief is always emphasized and in this sense he is regarded as the greatest help to the people, giving advice and material assistance as needed. Women may be very influential but never assume the position of a male chief. [Osgood 1970:124]

While Osgood does not address anthropological or Gwich'in models of gender relations, his cultural and theoretical assumptions are made explicit by the lack of

information concerning women throughout his descriptions of important activities and also in his use of a section titled "Position of Women" (*ibid:*131).

Richard Slobodin's major ethnographic work on the Peel River Gwich'in describes "certain aspects of the social organization of a North American hunting people" (1962:4). It continues to be one of the most insightful works on the Tetlit Gwich'in because of a combination of descriptive writing and an explicit focus on the history of the group. Slobodin is not concerned with acculturation to western civilization and he asserts this by suggesting that "deadfalls and snowshoes, dogteams and parkas, canvas tents and radios are equally Kutchin culture traits" (1962:4). Instead, his work is intended to "throw light on social process" (*ibid.*:5). Slobodin is referring to his interest in the theory of multilinear cultural evolution that proposed that "environments necessitate distinctive forms of adaptation, so different cultures in similar environments should exhibit similar patterns of development" (Hatch 1973:117). Slobodin begins his ethnography with a very useful description of the theoretical interests that influenced his work, in particular Julian Steward's theory of cultural evolution, and of the "primitive band" that builds on the concept of a "cultural core distinguished from secondary features." In his ethnography, Slobodin is concerned with the organization of groupings larger than the family, that were reported to have replaced the "primitive band" after contact and the initiation of the fur trade. Slobodin addresses an "economic-ecologic relationship" as the cultural core, while considering historical factors as the secondary features. Slobodin intended his work to add to the culture history of the Gwich'in, and by considering the structure of the group "in light both of ecologic considerations and of the particular history," he suggested that it may add to "an understanding of group formation in a hunting

economy," while also providing "some material for such general studies as cultural evolution" (*ibid.*).

While Slobodin's work focuses on social, or "band" organization, Gwich'in women are conspicuously missing from consideration in his analysis. The focus is on the "social dynamics of group formation in a hunting economy," (1962:5) in which the act of bringing in game is considered to be central. His interest lies in the organization of hunting, trapping and fishing parties. Gwich'in women are mentioned mainly in connection with an interest in group leadership, from which they are exempt:

> There is also a dubious tradition that two Peel River women of the nineteenth century were large-group leaders. Although probably not true, the very existence of such a tradition suggests the difference between leadership in the mobile trapping party and in local groups. There is no tradition of a woman or a handicapped man as a trapping party leader; one feels that no such tradition could arise. As for the small local group, we have seen that Mrs. Nash is, in effect, the leader of her extended family community. [Slobodin 1962:59]

Not much is said about Mrs. Nash beyond the statement that she is the "matriarch, the leader of the group," the group consisting of her sons and their families. Slobodin, reflecting the theoretical orientation of the period (*i.e.*, that of Steward 1955:143), does not expand on this because, as he points out, he is mainly interested in groupings larger than the family (1962:4). While Slobodin separated considerations of political economy from the domestic sphere, several anthropologists (whose work I draw on in a brief discussion of kinship below) have since examined the theoretical and practical construction of family, and the resulting political implications, in Athapaskan societies (for example, Ridington 1969; Asch 1998, 1980; Helm 1961).

The approaches taken by Osgood and Slobodin are important to consider as they frame the descriptions that make up their ethnographies. As all cross-cultural works do to

varying degrees, these works reflect underlying cultural assumptions that are deeply embedded in their descriptions of other cultures. However, we can tease out these assumptions to find the strengths of these important ethnographic works. The attention that these subjects have received in the past has important implications for the ways in which a study of Gwich'in culture must be formatted in response.

3.3 Gender Relations

In response to early feminist ideas about the study of gender, *i.e.*, studying women's activities as if they could, or should be completely separated from other social activities, Sherri Ortner, quoted below, builds on a shift in feminist anthropology from a type of analysis based on dichotomy to one based on the examination of gender as it is constructed through interaction:

> Specifically, an emphasis on "women" as an analytic category, when pushed too hard, tends to move in the direction of a very problematic naturalism – another of Michelle Rosaldo's points. That is, there is a tendency to slip from an "as if" posture, in which we isolate gender categories for heuristic (or political) reasons, to an assumption that "women" in some global and sociologically unqualified sense really exist out there in the world, as a natural class of objects with their own distinctive attributes. [Ortner 1996:137]

Ortner mentions that the use of gender as a heuristic device, while clearly appropriate in some regards, too often boils down to what she considers to be problematic in feminist theory, that women can then be seen as a "natural class of being" (*ibid.*). An awareness of this possibility is clearly reflected in the literature concerning language and gender. A central idea of Ortner's critique, and that of M. Rosaldo, appears to be that contemporary interests in gender should focus on relations rather than difference, as it is more productive to ask how such differences are culturally created through systems of meaning

than to merely focus on the existence of such differences (M. Rosaldo 1980: 401; Ortner 1996:116; Visweswaran 1997:616).

As Silverstein notes, "denotational language provides us a route of access to cultural process unmatched by any other" (1998a:401), and therefore many contemporary anthropologists use systems of meaning as their point of departure, systems of meaning that are created "through the speech-centered processes of human activity" (E. Basso 1990:3). How meaning is ascribed through these social processes, can be productively explored by using the concepts of indexicality, pragmatics, and metapragmatics as key theoretical tools. The cultural construction of gender is an appropriate one to exemplify such a theoretical framework. To begin with, Elinor Ochs argues that "the relation between language and gender is not a simple straightforward mapping of linguistic form to social meaning of gender. Rather the relation of language to gender is constituted and mediated by the relation of language to stances, social acts, social activities, and other social constructs" (1992:337). She points out that few features of language actually index gender, and therefore gender is necessarily constituted by the pragmatic functions of language, rather than the denotational.

> As such novices come to understand gender meanings through coming to understand certain pragmatic functions of language (such as expressing stance) and coming to understand local expectations *vis-à-vis* the distribution of these functions and their variable expression across social identities. [Ochs 1992:337]

Ochs writes that the relation between language and gender is "mediated and constituted through a web of socially organized pragmatic meanings" and therefore understandings of this relation must involve more than direct links between "linguistic forms and sex of speakers, referents, addressees and the like."

> Rather, such knowledge entails tacit understandings of (1) how particular linguistic forms can be used to perform particular pragmatic work (such as conveying social stance or social action) and (2) norms, preferences, and expectations regarding distribution of this work *vis-à-vis* particular social identities of speakers, referents, and addressees. [Ochs 1992:342]

Indexicality is an important dimension of language use as indices point to, or signal the existence of complex social understandings including meta-understandings. Silverstein broadens the applicability of the notion of indexicality by pointing out that the reality of "meaningful social practices" emerges from the indexical processes that make up such realities (1998b:128). Silverstein suggests that an ideological perspective on language be taken in order to determine how metalinguistic statements represent the reflectivity of actors themselves in a socially emergent process (1995:515). Silverstein provides the example of gendered speech and explains that variations of "saying the same thing" represent different markers of social identity of the participants (*ibid.*). On a larger scale, he is recognizing the importance of identifying how standards of speaking are created and what type of political or social values are reinforced by compliance with such standards (1995:513).

If metapragmatic awareness is defined as a speakers "ability to articulate the context for the use of certain linguistic expressions," then the expressions must possess certain referential and creative properties (Silverstein quoted in Duranti 1997a:210). These context-creating phenomena are marked by their pragmatic characteristics that indicate the "use of speech forms to evoke or establish particular types of contexts, including the speaker's stance or attitude, the social relations or relative status of the participants, and special attributes of particular individuals" (Duranti 1997a:201). Silverstein defines pragmatics as "the phenomenon of signal usage in communicative

situations," and "metapragmatics is the metalinguistics that describes such pragmatics" (Silverstein 1985:133). Recognizing that the concept of metapragmatics is central to language use is fundamental to the study of language and culture, as it is the area that is most likely to generate concrete information concerning how speakers feel about what they or others have said (*i.e.*, how it is interpreted, how it is constructed, its level of appropriateness, *etc.*), as indicated in their own speech and action.

As Keith Basso and Henry Selby have pointed out, theoretical work that deals with matters of indexicality and pragmatics is important to anthropology because "a systematic pragmatics could have far reaching implications for a clearer conceptualization of the linkage between language and culture" (1976:5). An understanding of how people interpret discourse, and in turn create a discourse about language is key to the idea that language offers a point of access to cultural process that is not found with any other phenomena. Silverstein writes:

> With a strictly linguistic focus, the pragmatic structures of speech give insight into the use of the same apparent "surface" material in distinct functional modes. And we can study the universal constraints on this rich patterning. From a broader anthropological perspective, the pragmatic system of speech *is* part of culture-in fact, perhaps the most significant part of culture - and a part of the structure and function$_{1,2}$ [6] of which is probably the real model for the rest of culture, when the term is a construct for the meaning system of socialized behavior. [Silverstein 1993:220]

Understanding the "pragmatic system of speech," is therefore central to understanding the ways in which social action is indexed communicatively. The contributions of speech act theory, as developed by John L. Austin (1962) and John R. Searle (1969), can be traced

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[6] Function$_1$ refers to the purposive use of language, function$_2$ refers to the indexical meaning of language such that "..there is an intimate dialectic interaction between them in actual ongoing communicative events" (Silverstein 1985:132).

through much of the work that I have drawn on in this and the preceding chapter. However, the critical application of the central tenets of speech act theory (*i.e.*, intention, truth, sincerity) to cross-cultural linguistic work has resulted in theoretically and ethnographically supported suggestions for a continuing focus on social relations and practices as they are indexed communicatively, rather than on individual acts, utterances and intentions (Duranti 1997a:244).

3.4 Kinship

Drawing on research among Aboriginal communities in Australia, Robert Tonkinson suggests that male-female interaction in hunter-gatherer societies is most productively characterized by complementarity and interdependence (2000:344). He writes this in response to models of gender relations, used and formulated elsewhere, that build on a framework of gender dominance. His response to such models includes drawing attention to kinship as a framework for social organization that integrates gender relations and other types of social behaviors.

> A frequently overlooked yet crucial factor explaining why so many Aboriginal societies seem to have exhibited an "egalitarian ethos" is the powerful controlling and leveling influence of kinship on social behavior. Discussions of egalitarianism in hunter-gatherer societies tend to ignore kinship as a factor altogether or else to focus on interpersonal behavior between spouses to the detriment of other male-female relationships. [Tonkinson 2000:345]

This focus on egalitarianism and autonomy, structured by ideas not entirely synonymous with those to be found in hunter-gatherer societies, is too narrow and does not recognize important complexities of social life, the "high levels of male-female complementarity and interdependence" (*ibid.*:344). As a consequence of this complex interdependence, it is counterproductive to draw out women's knowledge or activities as separate from an

overall spectrum of knowledge and activity for the purposes of learning about local categories and perspectives. Taking this type of approach in response to the lack of information concerning women's participation found in the major Gwich'in ethnographies would not reflect Gwich'in social relations as much as it would a foreign theoretical perspective.

Catherine McClellan, working with another Northern Athapaskan group in the southern Yukon in the late 1940's and early 1950's complements her rich ethnographic description with her own experiences. As a result she provides important observations on social organization:

> Among the Southern Tutchone, most of whom lack sib organization and a system of sharply ranked statuses, this individualism and the general laissez-faire approach to many situations often make it difficult to spot the locus of leadership or the system of organization in group activities. [McClellan 1975:338]

McClellan brings up as a central point that the organization of people in this Yukon society is different enough from that of western society, that a western anthropologist is not likely to recognize its systematicity without lengthy experience in the community. McClellan's point is important not only to Northern Athapaskan studies in general, but more specifically to projects that are concerned with local categories relating to natural resource use. Resource use is influenced by the larger patterns of social organization and therefore it is crucial to understand such patterns in order to claim any familiarity with local resource use. Northern Athapaskan kinship patterns have been addressed in several anthropological studies since Osgood and Slobodin did their research (for examples, Asch 1988,1998; Helm 1961; Ridington 1969; de Laguna 1971). As Michael Asch points out with regards to the Slavey Dene, "people are entangled in kinship relations of many and often contrasting sorts" (1998:145). Several types of frameworks have been used in

these intensive analyses, which are important for both ethnographic and theoretical reasons, and more importantly, as stated by Asch, political reasons (1980:50). Of particular interest is Asch's discussion of the ways that people make use of their systems of kinship organization (1998:145). For example, he points out that Slavey Dene kinship is not unilineal, and that people use "different pathways to trace out actual relationships" when "social circumstances make it necessary to change an individual's status." Asch writes that people's accounts of relations may appear to consist of "mistakes" and "contradictions," but points out that they are actually part of a conscious strategy.

> ..it may be that such wholesale recalculations of kinship relations are not as easily constructed within unilineal systems, where, for better or worse, lineality itself provides a means to forget "mistakes" and "contradictions" that are bound to arise within any system. Slavey Dene do not seem to view the world that way. The "mistakes" and "contradictions" are an essential element that can be used to construct their social universe. People therefore find it important to be aware of them and to know how to use them. They use this information to structure not only marriage but also hunting groups, residence groups, and so forth. [Asch 1998:145]

As a result of intensive participatory field work, Asch is able to report that it is senior Slavey women who have the information and the "theoretical framework to construct the social universe," and that it is a source of political power, "power that is central to the construction of Slavey Dene social and political life" (1998:146). Of equal importance is the discovery that Slavey people use a more conventional system when describing their kinship systems to people like anthropologists, and that the existence of this source of power is not visible for those unfamiliar with the actual, theoretical use of available relations. Clearly this resonates with what McClellan observed among the Southern Tutchone (1975:338). Although only a small part of Asch's larger contributions to this area of study, this information forms a significant contribution to hunter-gatherer studies

as it draws attention to the use of framing social organization in terms of kin relations, and along with information provided by McClellan, indicates that researchers must be cautious when using outside categories, such as "leadership," in drawing their conclusions.

While gender studied in isolation offers a limited perspective on social organization, kinship–taken as a theoretical framework –offers an orientation that includes gender as well as other types of social relations. Barbara Bodenhorn points out in a discussion of the Inupiat that anthropological models of gender often reflect "Euro-American tendencies to naturalize gendered difference which in turn lead to Euro-American assumptions about its significance" and that due to the pervasive nature of such assumptions, actual local categories of classification may remain unexamined (1990:57). This has been pointed out by other anthropologists who study gender (Ortner 1996:137) and also with respect to gender relations in contemporary hunter-gatherer societies (Hensel 1996:15, Fienup-Riordan 1990:9). As Ortner points out, a male/female dichotomy has specific value to questions about " how and why such constructs are organized the way they are in different cultures and historical periods." She cautions, however, that "using gender distinction as a basis for organizing social life and thought" does not stimulate inquiry into the existence of other analytic frameworks that may be more suitable, and thereby extends false boundaries (Ortner 1996:137).

Several recent anthropological works provide excellent examples of how critical local categories can be examined to shed light on local, and anthropological, models of gender. For example, Anne Fienup-Riordan suggests that animals and humans, rather than genders, form the basic social categories among Eskimo peoples (1990:8).

Bodenhorn contributes to Fienup-Riordan's observations by suggesting that in Inupiat society, the concept of gender can be extended "to be an important vehicle for marking not only relations between men and women, but also between humans and animals" (1990:57). Chase Hensel points out that among Yupiit, "processors have the potential to affect a hunter's relationship with classes of animals and with individual animals that the hunter would hope to catch over and over again" (1996:193). Rather than complying with Western models of gender, these works illustrate that analyses can productively reflect local categories. As these works examine social relations in hunter-gatherer societies, they necessarily discuss the incorporation of animals into the system of human social relations. Discussions of Yupiit understandings of animal spirits as persons capable of carrying out their own intentions (Fienup-Riordan 1990:9), stimulate an awareness that contemporary anthropological research among hunter-gatherer societies must carefully examine the concepts used to frame ideas about the sustenance and renewability of "resources."

In the following section, rather than begin with a description of how Gwich'in women run their fish camps, I will try to describe a few activities that are central to life in a fish camp. As I do not yet have the experience to separate locally relevant categories, my intention is to show through description that Slobodin's focus on large group formation, as well as a potential response that would focus on a gender based separation of activities, would both be part of a the same inadequate framework with which to approach certain aspects of Gwich'in culture. My description of activities in a fish camp are obviously also a reflection of my theoretical orientation; one which I anticipate has

much to contribute to the expansion of literature focused on the Gwich'in. As Alessandro Duranti writes:

> ..to the extent to which pragmatics is concerned with the meanings implied or instantiated through relationships between signs and the context of their use, it must study the local theories and the local practices of particular speakers as heirs of specific cultural traditions. In this perspective, ethnography becomes an essential element of the analytical process. Furthermore, once we start thinking about speakers as social actors and carriers of social traditions, we are compelled to relate the meaning of their individual utterances to the larger contexts those utterances help sustain (or challenge). [Duranti 1992:25]

I will use this model of social interaction in order to address the ways in which activities important to life in a fish camp are carried out, with a focus on activities that involve what are labeled outside the Gwich'in community as "forest resources." This also provides an opportunity to illustrate how the theoretical orientation, enhanced by the work of people like Fienup-Riordan (1990), Hensel (1996), Bodenhorn (1990), Ochs (1991) and Silverstein (1985, 1993, 1995, 1998b) among many others, provides a way to examine Gwich'in social interaction in a way that offers a different perspective than that provided by Osgood and Slobodin more than fifty years ago.

3.5 Fish Camps

Slobodin describes an early fish camp as consisting of a large group of people that forms at a good fishing location. The camp's location changes as the fish populations, migrations, and river channels change (1962:58). He described the location and construction of fish-weirs as being arranged by the group leader and reported that during the time of his field work (1938-39, 1946-47), people "used drift-nets and seines" owned by individual families or paired families (*ibid.*). He writes that the camp leader may come "to own" the fishery by way of customary use, and that "the leader is an esteemed and

important man who has summered regularly at the fishery for a number of years" (*ibid.*:61). Slobodin reports that the social structure of a fish camp is the same as that of a meat camp, and that the leader of each is usually an "older-mature or elderly man of high rank or ceremonial leader" (*ibid.*:73). This description of a fish camp provided a good example of the ethnographic orientation that my Gwich'in teachers find frustrating, because it more strongly reflects Slobodin's theoretical focus than it does actual social interaction. It does not reflect the local "logic of social relations" (Duranti 1992:25). As I am a newcomer, my description of fish camp activities will not entirely reflect the local "logic of social relations" either, but after spending time in a Gwich'in fish camp at Eight Miles, and because of my status as a female member of a research team I can provide a different perspective on Gwich'in social interaction than that which Slobodin provides. By spending time with Gwich'in women, and by having the opportunity to observe the everyday activities involved in life at a fish camp, I have been able to learn something of the ways in which such activities are carried out, and the decision-making process engaged by people in choosing where a fish camp might be set up, where wood for heating and for the smokehouse is gathered, and what type of wood is preferred for a smokehouse.

Eileen Koe has told me that the people from every fish camp at Eight Miles are somehow related to her, because the community has largely grown along family lines and other groups of families are strongly associated with other areas. From listening to people speak about summer fishing, it seems that fish camps are largely identified as belonging to the woman, or elder woman that uses the camp as a place to process fish. Even if the camp itself is used for other purposes at other times of the year, as many at Eight Miles

are, in the summer time it is referred to as the camp of the woman using it. Although I have heard it mentioned that occasionally some men have been known to "work with fish," it is mainly something that is done by women. In my experience, I think it would be extremely difficult to accurately define a single leadership role in a fish camp situation. It seems that husbands, sons, and sons-in-law are aware of what needs to be done when their mothers and wives are making dry fish and instructions are often passed on from these women, in subtle and sometimes more direct ways. It is usually men that set and check nets, but the details of how and when they do this are decided in response to requests made by the woman who is "working with fish."

While the social structure of the community has changed in the last fifty years it is possible that the positions associated with today's Chief and various councils have replaced the sort of leadership that Slobodin was referring to. However, the people filling such positions in the current system do not make the decisions that are directly relevant to life in a fish camp. In contemporary fish camps, decisions concerning where people go to fish, how much they fish and with who, are largely made as the result of conversations between women who work with the fish and the other women or men who are available to help them at that time. For example, Thomas and Eileen Koe decided to move their fish camp from further down the river to Eight Miles, so that they could spend more time with their family and because there are currently good eddies at Eight Miles. Their children work in town and can bring out their own families to the camp more often now that it is only a short drive away. Eight Miles is the location of many other fish camps, and Neil Colin has said that the Mouth of the Peel used to be a similar type of place, where people would come together to fish in the summer time. While I am not sure how

the situation may have changed since Slobodin carried out his field work, it is possible that different factors currently influence people's decisions about where to set up fish camps. It should also be pointed out that I was not looking to understand social structure in the way that Slobodin was, and as such did not become aware of the existence, and consequences, of possible patterns of leadership.

Another opportunity to observe the complementarity of men's and women's activities was presented to me in August of 1999. While not directly concerned with fishing, the collection of dry wood for heating is important in the summer time because the weather can be very wet. In August of 1999, it was very damp and several people were staying at the Koe's camp at Eight Miles, so both a tent frame and a cabin needed to be heated at night. Rob Wishart and I accompanied Thomas and Eileen and one of their grand-daughters to go by boat to pick up some dry wood just a short distance down the river. When we arrived at this spot Thomas and Rob set to cutting up dry wood into lengths that could be carried to the boat while Eileen and I collected "sticky gum," the sap of spruce trees.[7] The best time of year to collect sticky gum is the spring when the sap is running, and this is when most people prefer to collect it, if they are able to "pass spring on the land." However, Eileen used this occasion to collect it because there were many trees at this site that were covered in it. Some of these trees had been previously cut down by Thomas and left to dry out more before he came back to haul them to his camp. He had cut them down because they were dead or nearly dead trees. On this trip, Eileen spotted some more trees in the same condition, on which we could see a great deal of

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[7] Alestine Andre and Alan Fehr report that Sticky gum, or *Dzih ant'at* in Tetlit Gwich'in, is the new sap that has recently run off the tree, and that the hard, older kind of tree sap that forms at breaks in the bark is called Spruce gum, or *Dzih drinh'* in Tetlit Gwich'in (2000:18). We were collecting the hard, older kind on this occasion, but Eileen referred to it as sticky gum.

sticky gum that was too high to reach with her broom handle/sticky gum collection tool. Thomas and Eileen decided that Thomas would cut down these trees, we would collect the Sticky gum, and Thomas would return when the wood had dried out a little bit and take it back to camp. Eileen then had enough sticky gum to boil down and freeze, to feel that she had a good supply in her freezer for when she or a family member might need some. Eileen boils the Sticky gum down, strains it and uses the juice that is left over as a remedy to drink for colds, sore throats, and the flu, among other things. Eileen also keeps a supply of un-processed sticky gum in the freezer for applying to cuts and slivers.

Willows, for burning in the smokehouse are gathered in a similar fashion. Men are usually the ones who cut the willows around the camp as they are needed for the smokehouse. Although women frequently do gather fuel for smokehouse fires, making dry fish is hard work so other people usually gather willows for them. The types of willows that are burned, green or dry, depend on the way the person processing the fish intends it to taste. Eileen generally used green willows for her smokehouse fire, however another elder has told me that as a young girl, her mother's smokehouse fire was kept burning hot with good, dry willows as the amount of smoke produced by burning green wood made the fish too brown, and not as tasty.

Decisions about where a fish camp is set up, and how various sorts of wood are gathered for use in the camp are made based on the goals and efforts of both men and women. As I hope to have shown with these two examples of activities basic to any fish camp, Slododin's description of a fish camp does not reflect the type of interaction that makes up everyday life in a camp, and his mention of the fish camp leader is somewhat misleading as it does not address all factors affecting how important decisions are made. I

also hope to have shown that an analysis that would separate Gwich'in women's knowledge of willows and spruce trees from Gwich'in men's knowledge of the same things would be equally misleading.

3.6 Summary

The temptation to focus exclusively on Gwich'in women's contributions to Gwich'in culture in order to fill the gaps in the relevant literature would not reflect local categories or perspectives, and neither would it satisfy Eileen Koe. It would simply reflect an inappropriate model of gender relations. However, approaching gender as an interactive, discursive relationship that is an essential feature of human interaction stimulates inquiry into the existence of other frameworks. As Asch points out kin relationships are of great importance to the organization of life in Athapaskan communities, and as such provide a relevant theoretical framework within which the meanings of many types of social relationships can become visible, *i.e.,* marriage, hunting groups, and residence groups (Asch 1998:145). The activities that make up life in a Gwich'in fish camp are based on both resources and relationships, however as those people quoted in this chapter have pointed out, this sort of separation, valid from certain other cultural perspectives, cannot be assumed to be culturally valid to the Gwich'in. A person using a model that separates resources from relationships does so at the risk of leaving important cultural assumptions unexamined (Bodenhorn 1990, Hensel 1996), in particular, assumptions about the need or possibility of making such separations. The use of spruce trees, willows, and fish are part of "living on the land" and as a human activity revolve around complex social relations. In the final two chapters, I continue to explore

Gwich'in interaction with their landscape and Gwich'in perspectives on sustaining their land.

Chapter Four

Gwich'in "Forestry"

4.1 Introduction

The formation of a long term forest management plan for Gwich'in land must necessarily take into account the forces that have acted to influence the present state of the land. The Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board therefore drafted a research question which sought to do exactly this, to roughly determine the quantity of logs taken by sawmills and steamships at the turn of the century (Anderson 2000:1). In response to this question our research team carried out both oral historical work in the community of Fort McPherson and research into relevant archival material. While this enabled us to provide the Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board with an estimate of some of the dimensions of fuel use by steamships, it also provided an opportunity to learn a great deal about Gwich'in culture, by focusing on the practical category of "wood."

4.2 Steamships

The archival component of our forestry project was undertaken in order to gather information, to be considered with the oral historical information, concerning how much wood was taken, where it was taken from, and who did the work to provide it.

Trading companies such as the Hudson's Bay Company used steamships in order to increase the amount of trade by accelerating transportation to what were at that time, extremely remote areas. Between the 1840's and the late 1870's, large wooden boats, called York Boats, were used. York Boats did not require any direct fuel as they were tracked upstream by men walking along the banks of the rivers, drifted downstream, and

were much smaller, with less capability than the steamships to haul large quantities of goods (Government of the Northwest Territories 1987). When the trading companies began to use steamships in the late 1870's, they were used to carry supplies for the fur trade posts, trading goods, as well as "mail, the Bishop, and children returning from school in Hay River" (*ibid.*).

The first steamship in the area began to run in 1887 and the last wood fueled ship converted to oil *circa* 1945. Not only did these ships require an immense amount of fuel for a span of approximately sixty years, they created a demand for wood that has never before, nor since, existed in the area. As several elders told us, the ships brought a considerable change in Gwich'in lifestyle, as well. Ethel Stewart, who spent time as a teacher and researcher in Fort McPherson, worked with Mrs. Sarah Simon in order to write a history of the Fort, and thereby learned about the steamships coming up the Peel River to the town of Fort McPherson.

> In 1887, the big wooden supply boats, that had to be tracked upstream, were replaced by steamers. For nearly sixty years, the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company's steamboat was an annual event anticipated by the people of Peel River. Indeed, one of the Indian families took the word Steamboat for a surname. Mrs. Sarah Simon, my principal informant on life in the old days at Peel River, came to my house one evening in March 1952 to tell me about how the people lived fifty years ago, and how they came to depend on the arrival of the supply boat each year… After the boat left people stocked up with fishing gear, tea, sugar, tobacco, flour, baking powder, and lump sugar, some hardware, and hunting supplies. The head chief than gave a feast and told his people to go fishing. [Stewart 1954:40]

One elder, Neil Colin, shared his memories of these events with us. Neil Colin explained that the steamships influenced the lives of many people. For example, he explained to us that the jobs provided by the steamships were good because they provided a way to earn cash while staying out on the land. People would cut wood during the winter and spring

and pile it on the banks, and then when the steamship arrived in the summer time they would be paid for their labor. He said that people would celebrate the arrival of the steamships because they would be paid, and because the boat brought groceries and children that had been away at residential schools in Hay River and Aklavik. He told us that the conversion of the steamships to oil was a critical event because it was only after the opportunity to earn an income while cutting wood ceased to be available that elders began to move from the Mouth of the Peel area into Fort McPherson to receive old age pensions, and younger people were kept away from the land in pursuit of other sorts of jobs. It was around 1950 when "things started to change." Although these jobs kept people out on the land, the introduction of cash for labor "jobs" can be seen as having changed the way of life for many people.

The archival material that I looked at roughly covers the time between the early 1870's and the 1930's, and the oral information is concerned with a period during which the elders with whom we spoke were young, in the last few decades of the period in which steamships were fueled by wood. The oral information concerning the considerable change in lifestyle that occurred when people no longer had the opportunity to be paid for cordwood is compelling. That local people cut the wood for the steamships was largely missing from the archival material, as the steamships' logs mention only stopping for wood, and occasionally that they would have to leave a woodcutter on shore. It was not always recorded in the ships' logs how many cords[8] were taken on board and significant discrepancies between seemingly identical trips make it difficult to determine how much fuel was used. Richard Slobodin learned that during 1900-1915, 67 Gwich'in men worked as woodcutters for steamboats, mining camps, traders, missions and the

[8] A cord of wood is a pile four feet high, four feet wide and eight feet long.

police, and 62 worked as deck-hands on steamboats (1962:32). One elder told us that he worked as a deckhand on a steamship, and that his job was to continually throw wood into the firebox. He said that the steamships burned any type of wood, green or dry. Oscar Green (1987), a deck hand on the SS Distributor (one of the later steamships) said that it burned 3 ½ cords an hour, but was more efficient after a new firebox was added. An elder from Tsiigehtchic told Rob Wishart that he earned $8 per cord and that the ships burned one cord per hour.

By using information available in the ship's logs and oral information to create a hypothetical trip through the Gwich'in Settlement Area (hereafter the GSA), we estimated that one trip would require approximately 267 cords (Murray in Anderson, *et al.*2000:15). This breaks down into 152.7 cords for upstream travel and 114.6 cords for downstream travel. We determined this by using an index of the distance between the Mouth of the Peel and Fort McPherson and extrapolating from the archival material that it took roughly four hours of up-stream travel to go twenty-five miles, and roughly three hours of down-stream travel to go the same twenty-five miles. Using Oscar Green's estimate of 3 ½ cords per hour, it would have taken approximately 14 cords to travel 25 miles, which equals approximately 1.8 miles per cord for upstream travel, and 10.5 cords for the same 25 miles going the other way, which equals 2.4 miles per cord for downstream travel. On this hypothetical trip the ship would visit the four important communities of Tsiigehtchic, Aklavik, Fort McPherson and the Mouth of the Peel and would therefore travel 275 upstream miles and 275 downstream miles within the GSA.

Even if this estimate is incorrect by a factor of 0.5, this still indicates that a considerable amount of wood was used by these ships over the sixty year period during

which they were fueled with wood. The ship's logs for two of the three main steamships mention making one trip per open water season within the GSA (Hudson's Bay Company, Archive Search File – Steamer Wrigley 1937, SS Mackenzie River Ship's Log 1921-1922). Evelyn Stefansson wrote that in normal times during the 1930's, steamships arrived in Aklavik three times per season (1945:140).

The Hudson's Bay Company ran the SS Wrigley, the SS Mackenzie River, and many people also mentioned the SS Distributor, which I learned was run by another company. These are the names that I heard people mention, however I also came across the names of three others in the Peel River and Aklavik Post Journals, the "Eva," the "Northland Trader" and the "Liard River" (Hudson's Bay Company, Peel River Post Journal 1913-1914: July 8-10, 1914, Aklavik Post Journal 1929-30:4). Peter Usher points out that in addition to the Hudson's Bay Company there were at least two other companies operating in the Mackenzie Delta that used steamships as a transport system (1971:27). This points to fairly heavy river traffic as well as substantial fuel use.

As I mentioned above, an elder from Tsiigehtchic said that he earned $8 per cord for steam ship fuel. Neil Colin, who did not cut cord wood as he was too young, remembered people being paid $2-3 per cord. It is likely that this lower figure is how much Neil's elders were paid and therefore the elder from Tsiigehtchic was reporting the higher rate from a later time. The following tables provide a range of estimates based on the information provided by Gwich'in elders and the archival material.

Table 1: Range of Estimates for the Number of Cords Used by Steamships Per Season in the GSA

# of Ships	Cords/Hour	
	1	3.5
2	152	534
3	228	801
4	304	1068

Table 2: Range of Estimates for the Potential Income Generated by the Number of Cords Supplied (as estimated in Table 1)

	Number of Cords					
	152	228	304	534	801	1068
$2/cord	$304	$456	$608	$1068	$1602	$2136
$3/cord	$456	$684	$912	$1602	$2403	$3204
$8/cord	$1216	$1824	$2432	$4272	$6408	$8544

Obviously the above tables do not indicate the full extent of possible variation in the amount of fuel supplied, or the money exchanged for fuel, and such figures are only meaningful when considered in relation to the cost of goods and other rates of income, *i.e.*, trapping was for most of recent history the primary source of cash income for people in the Mackenzie River Basin. According to Neil Colin, the money that people earned in exchange for cord wood was enough to buy necessary supplies for life at the Mouth of the Peel.

When Neil Colin's information about the change in lifestyle that occurred when steamships converted to oil is considered, this amount of cord wood seems quite reasonable. For example, several hundred cords could be supplied each year if many families devoted part of their time to such an endeavor while living in the delta area. Neil Colin explained that about 47 families made up the Mouth of the Peel community, before

people moved to town. If the end of this opportunity to receive money in exchange for cutting cord wood resulted in such a noted change in lifestyle, then it is reasonable to assume that several hundred cords were cut for steamship use every year, keeping in mind that the Mouth of the Peel was only one community among several others in the GSA.

Information provided by Neil Colin and other elders adds another dimension to the provision of cord wood. They explained that these ships pulled barges loaded with wood. Neil mentioned that these barges were necessary to provide fuel for the journey along the Mackenzie River as the high banks of this river made it difficult to collect wood during much of the journey between the mouth of the Peel River and Fort Good Hope. He speculated that the steamships would probably load up with wood again near Fort Good Hope. That enough wood was taken to provide fuel for travel within the GSA as well as outside adds to the large amount of wood that was used. While she does not mention the use of barges for hauling fuel, Stefansson mentions that as many as five barges loaded with freight were pulled by a single boat (1945:142), and that these barges were built to handle various loads, the largest, the "Number 500" could handle up to 600 tons of freight (*ibid.*:144). I do not know if the cord per hour figures that we were told and read in the archival material are the same amount that would be necessary to haul barges weighing up to 600 tons. While the ship would have deposited the remainder of its load in the communities in the GSA, according to Neil it would also be hauling a load of fuel on its way out of the GSA, and likely burned fuel at a similar rate.

I learned a great deal from Neil Colin during informal conversation as he is always willing to sit and talk to people about his country and its history, of which he is

known to be something of an expert. However our team of three anthropology students also conducted a series of formal interviews with him[9]. The following transcribed sections are excerpts from these interviews. These interviews centered on place names and the history of the Mouth of the Peel area. The area called the "Mouth of the Peel," or "Indian Village" on maps, is located where one branch of the Peel River meets the Mackenzie River. This area is important for many connected reasons, the most important one seems to be that people went there because it was a community.

Neil: So 47 families were at mouth of the Peel back in 1940's and 50's anything else?
Rob: Why did people start moving there in the first place, to Mouth of the Peel?
Neil: Why they move here?
[yah]
Okay why they move there is because that's the place where the fish come up the Peel and then come up from Mackenzie
[ohh, ok]
and the same time, so many people and there's so many eddies
[yah]
and you can set net any place and there's, they like to be where there's lots of people
[yah]
and every Sunday of course they have church service, sometimes a minister, Anglican minister come down from Fort McPherson, go down for a couple days, make service, give out communion, you know communion is give out wine you know, and it .. and then that's where steamboat used to go past.
Come from Mackenzie and go down to Aklavik, and come back, leave a barge, go up to McPherson, come back, and they go back up Mackenzie River, that's steamboat, that's Distributor, and other one is Mackenzie

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[9] These interviews took place on July 24th and 25th, 2000 and were held in a conference room at the Fort McPherson Band Office. Due to the location of the interview, and the fact that we were exchanging money for information in such a direct manner, these interviews had a strangely formal quality to them. We had made arrangements to spend time down at the Mouth of the Peel with Neil, however community events and time constraints made this trip impossible. Those present included Neil Colin, Robert Wishart, Derek Honeyman and myself as well as others passing through the band office and dropping in to say hello.

So last time steamboat came to that country, this country was 1947 was the last time.
[mm]
So why people go there is because uh its good place for fishing and its good place for, it's lots of people
[yeah]
So very few people are still up river, very few peoples down Mackenzie delta, they are alone
[mhm]
but where it's lots of people is down at mouth of Peel, everybody swim and set snares and hunt ducks and.. they just live there and enjoy life
[yah]
but today it's different, yah, I still go down there year 2000, this spring I stayed there, down there 28 days, I stayed there this spring …

Neil told us that there were stores in the Mouth of the Peel area, and that these stores were very convenient as they kept people from having to travel all the way to town (Fort McPherson).

Neil: And at Mouth of Peel too, used to be store there, store there and .. it belong to my dad Christopher and Johnny Semple,
[mm]
it's in the tent frames
[mm]
Rob: Was that connected with the Hudson's Bay, or
Neil: no no, (laughing)
[no]
their own (still laughing)
[their own store]
their own, they got nothing to do with that, their own. Steamboat used to land there bring out some cases of oranges and apples and eggs, gum and candy and few frying pans and pots, tea little sugar, and .. not very much, but.. of course if you go there with dollar goodness they give you maybe fifty cents a dozen eggs and some apples and oranges just for a dollar. Everything's cheap …

These stores, of which there were several that lasted for varying amounts of time were considered to be good because according to Neil Colin they provided basic groceries and

cash, traded furs and provided money in advance for furs, and generally provided an option to having to travel all the way to Fort McPherson. In a report on fur trade posts of the Northwest Territories between 1870 and 1970, Usher lists each of the stores that Neil Colin refers to, as well as others (1971:88). According to Usher's report, the latest date at which one of these stores operated in the Peel River, and Mouth of the Peel area was 1950[10]. This is consistent with Neil's description of people leaving the area and life changing *circa* 1950.

As I mentioned above, these steamships required a large amount of fuel. The following excerpt includes Neil Colin's words on this matter:

Neil: ..from Sam River down, Sam River… this place I seen whole bunch of cord wood there
Rob: All along the bank eh
Neil: Oh yah, yah, Andrew Kunnizie place, he cut lots too Andrew Kunnizie, swede saw
[mm]
but mostly, I don't know, could tell where people cut wood as you're going down
Rob: You can see it eh
Neil: You could, you could hardly see any timber that means from the shore you can see stumps there and there I could, could tell where people cut steamboat cord wood. They load up lots of wood and then they come up and he always leave barge here, Roy Creek, one, he leave one barge there and he goes to McPherson. He go back and take other barge and hook it on, leave other barge there, always somebody looking after that barge, and he goes to Aklavik. About four days and he come back with load of wood…
[mhm]
and hook those two barge and up Mackenzie they go.
[mm]

Rob: How did people cut wood, they used to do it in the winter time?
Neil: Yah, winter time and in spring time .. even in summer time..

[10] Andrew Kunnezi's store operated from 1943-1950 on the banks of the Peel, and Johnny Semple's store operated from 1946-1949 at the Mouth of the Peel village (Usher 1971:87-8).

[oh yeah]
two or three dollar a cord
[mm]

Rob: This was in the 1930's I guess eh?

Neil: Just wait, 1947 is the last time steamboat was down there
[yah]
Mackenzie or Distributor, but there's only place you could get wood maybe around Good Hope too I don't know
[mm ...oh yeah]
because it's in the hills huh

Rob: yah, 'cause those banks are real high eh, down the Mackenzie

Neil: [yah yah]
they must still load up some wood going back up I'm pretty sure

Ara: [oh I see]

Neil: 'Cause you can't burn all that thing right up to Hay River, you got to load up some more wood going back up

After spending time talking with Neil Colin and other elders about these steamships we were able to fill in the major gaps in our knowledge of the impact of steamships. It seems that people provided the wood for these ships in a way that was consistent with the ways in which they used the land for other purposes, and that the major change was the amount of wood that was taken. The ships' logs also occasionally mention dropping off wood cutters at various places along the Mackenzie, so it is possible that this was also done in the GSA as well. Specifically, one ship's log mentions that the crew occasionally had to cut wood but usually it was already cut and stacked in wood piles (SS Mackenzie River, Ship's Logs 1921-1922). Stefansson, who mentioned steamships in her description of Aklavik in the 1930's wrote:

> In the old days stops would be made along the tree-studded river banks while four-foot logs were cut to feed the hungry furnaces, but now neat piles of logs are usually waiting along the way. [1945:141]

This confirms both what many people told us about the trees in the delta being cut down by outsiders, and also that local people were, at a later time, employed to cut wood for these ships.

Fueling steamships was not the only activity to draw on the forests. Schools, trading posts and missions must also be considered as these also required wood for construction and for heating purposes (Honeyman in Anderson *et al.*, 2000:20), as well as the building of towns. While mapping forest use sites, an elder showed us one place where logs were taken for pilings as far away as Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk. Several people told our team that it was mainly outsiders who "cut down the delta," so while Neil Colin and others have described the way that local Gwich'in provided wood for fuel and lumber, it is seems that wood was also harvested by non-Gwich'in, and as I will discuss below, the Gwich'in consider their system to be distinct from others that they know to have been used in the area and elsewhere.

Another elder who had spent time at the Mouth of the Peel, Simon Snowshoe, told our team that he worked at a sawmill that was located at the Mouth of the Peel. Simon took us to see the site of the old mill, and explained that under the supervision of Roy Wright (a non-Gwich'in man who ran a series of saw mills along the banks of the Peel and Mackenzie Rivers), wood was taken from directly behind the saw mill, while those who did not work at the mill floated wood down from up the Peel.

Neil Colin said that logs from this mill were used as pilings, to "help build Inuvik," and that sawdust from this and other sawmills was sold as insulation for houses in town. Simon said that 500 cords were cut at the mill, and that at the time that the mill was operating it was located right on the river bank. As I learned as we walked back from

the current shore line in search of the mound of sawdust that indicates where the mill was, the river bank has changed a great deal. I estimate that we walked for close to half a kilometer before we arrived at the site of the old mill. The area between the old and new shore line is now "thick with willows." Simon pointed out that at an earlier time wood for steamships was also cut in this area.

Neil Colin mentioned that, at the time, he could see where cord wood had been taken for the steamships, because it was easy to notice the stumps, and lack of timber from the shore. However, two things in particular made such areas difficult for our research team to notice. The first, as we learned while mapping a series of forest use sites in order to better understand typical cutting patterns, is that it would be nearly impossible to land a boat anywhere along the river banks and not find evidence of trees being used. Rob Wishart and I initially attempted to map these sites by traveling by boat with people, and quickly learned that it would be better to label the sites we mapped as examples of typical forest use sites rather than attempt to map the entire inventory. We also sat down with other people to mark areas that they knew about, on maps, and would end up being told, "just circle the whole thing."

During our interview with Neil Colin, he mentioned a few places named after steamship activity. One such place, near Point Separation, had a Gwich'in name that refers to a steamship being flipped over there by the wind. Another place, named "Boat Landing" refers to the fact that a boat landed there "one time to put cordwood in the boat." The second reason that it might be difficult to identify areas where steamship fuel was cut is that the river changes from year to year and this strongly affects the banks in different places over time (see Appendix, Photograph 5). For example, in the Peel River

Post Journal (April 13-15 1914), there is mention of Hudson's Bay Company employees cutting wood for steamships at a camp "located on the island," and that they cut 25 cords there. It seemed that the author was referring to a familiar and relatively close island, and while there are small islands around the post, it does not seem that enough wood could be cut on any of them to have supplied 25 cords. It is possible that the island has been greatly eroded, and is now much smaller, or has been completely eroded.

Admittedly, the range of estimates of how much cord wood was used by steamships each year is sketchy, but even if it happens to be twice as high as it should be, it still points to heavy use of the forests for industrial purposes, *i.e.*, 152-1068 cords per season. Understanding the forces that have acted on the forests in the past is vital to the Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board as it works to construct a long term sustainable forest management plan for the area, and it is equally important to recognize how such a demand was incorporated into local patterns of life. As Simon Snowshoe mentioned at the sawmill at the Mouth of the Peel, logs were acquired by a different system by those under the supervision of Roy Wright than those Gwich'in who brought logs in from farther up the Peel River. While steamship wood was likely not acquired in the same way, it is obviously important to understand systems used to acquired wood for other purposes in order to understand the systems of the past.

Our research team had the opportunity to learn about a Gwich'in system for collecting logs during the summer of 1999 as talk about a community project illustrated the values that the community places on certain practices. That this project was occurring while we were there learning about local perspectives on forestry is fortuitous as it stimulated a great deal of talk about forestry practices. Most importantly, for my

purposes, this project made certain aspects of Gwich'in perspectives on sustainability explicit, so that even a newcomer like myself could begin to understand the importance of the Gwich'in system.

4.3 A Contemporary Example of Gwich'in Forestry Practices

On the day that we arrived in Fort McPherson in 1999, my first official field season, Rob Wishart and I were greeted with a hot meal of caribou meat, as Eileen Koe and her husband Thomas had been waiting for us to arrive at their fish camp at Eight Miles. Later that day when Eileen and I were waiting for the ferry in order to get into town, I noticed a large pile of big logs on the other side of the river (see Appendix, Photograph 6). Eileen explained to me that they were building a new co-op store in Fort McPherson, with a restaurant, hotel and conference rooms attached. Part of this was to be built out of logs, and an outside contractor had been hired to supervise and direct the sawmill and construction of the log building. The sawmill was at Eight Miles, the building would be assembled there and then re-assembled in town later.

Eileen explained to me that the Co-op committee had decided that they did not want a logging company from outside the community to come in and cut down their trees. They were especially concerned about the effects of clear cutting. Clear cutting seems to be well known as an activity that happens frequently "down south" and the effects of clear cutting are well known as they are shown on television and other media. Eileen explained to me how the logs for the Co-op building were to be collected and made it clear that clear cutting was an irresponsible practice. It was therefore more appropriate to create a system based on the existing community model. By opening the

collecting of logs up to the community, the Co-op committee was taking advantage of the way that the community uses the land in the local manner. This was seen as a good alternative to clear cutting as the people who provided the logs took them from different areas, ensuring that no single area was over used.

The system by which logs were acquired for the construction was explained to me on several different occasions by people of all ages, which emphasized the fact that it was common knowledge. In 1999, any one who brought in peeled logs of a certain size to the sawmill at Eight Miles would get one hundred dollars per log with a limit of ten logs per person. These logs were required to be straight, twenty feet long with a minimum ten-inch diameter top. This seemed to work as there was never any shortage of logs, and if it was anticipated that the mill would need more by a certain time, people working at the sawmill put out word. In response, people who had the time and the means, and wanted to, would set out to bring in more logs. This involved a group of men traveling up the river for several days at a time and returning with peeled logs.

The Gwich'in system is different than that used for clear cutting because it involves an agreement based on the individual decisions of several people. The selection of logs for the Co-op building was representative of the system with which trees are harvested for what Wishart (1999) describes as large scale purposes. This system probably has a long history and people see it as being a socially logical one. Usually two to four men set out specifically to cut logs in areas that they know have the type of tree that they are looking for. The knowledge of where the trees are comes from being on the land while pursuing other activities, including moose hunting, trapping *etc.* While people are pursuing other activities they are always keeping an eye out for different types of

good wood and will comment on it. People also know where good trees can be found because of the community based knowledge of where people are presently cutting or where they have done so in the past, and which areas are best for certain types or sizes of trees. Individual knowledge of which areas are most convenient and useful for other reasons, is the basis for making decisions about where to 'harvest' appropriate trees.

The Co-op project was useful for us as it provided a salient way to bring up talk about forestry practices. In other words, people were already talking about getting logs, who was doing it, where they were going, how many they were getting *etc.*, in daily conversation. In addition, the Gwich'in ethic of utilizing forestry products was clearly spelled out by the insistence that harvesting should proceed at the community level, in this non-intensive manner. The by-products of the logs were used by most people around Eight Miles. Slabs left over after the logs were squared off were used in the construction of buildings such as skidoo shacks and fish houses. These slabs and other left over pieces of wood were commonly used as fire wood at many camps (see Appendix, Photograph 7).

4.4 Interpretation

That the archival material did not contain much information concerning the procurement of steamship fuel supports the probability that it was largely done by Gwich'in people in a Gwich'in fashion. However, it is important to point out that my analysis of the archival material is perhaps not sufficient, as I focused only on the extraction of specific information regarding steamships. This is due to the fact that I carried out most of the archival research before doing fieldwork, and therefore was not able to notice the relevance of other information included in the post journals and ships'

logs. This is important because the information that I have presented does not address the larger integration of social relationships, and while I have emphasized the contextualized nature of the Gwich'in oral historical information, the lack of context for the archival material creates a false dichotomy between Gwich'in and non-Gwich'in histories, when in reality it is unlikely that any archival material of this nature is completely lacking information about local perspectives. As Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert write:

> The encounter between Native and non-Native peoples has been a long and complex engagement of mutual dialogue, communication, and miscommunication. Given the intensity of the engagement, even the most Eurocentric of texts cannot help but provide glimpses of Native actions, traces of Native voices. [Brown and Vibert 1996:xiv]

In response to specific research questions, several Gwich'in elders were able to tell us about who took wood for steamships and where they took it from. As this knowledge was based on their own experience they were able to provide us with a comprehensive picture of the impact of these operations on the Fort McPherson community. That these steamships created a great deal of change for local people and the way that they used the forest is largely missing from my reading of the archival material. Brown and Vibert, referring to Julie Cruikshank's comments on the integration of oral history and written history, write that it is less productive to try to piece together "disparate perspectives into a coherent synthesis" than it is to recognize each account as it is constructed within its particular context.

> The exercise, then, is not so much to straighten out the "facts," but to understand how different ways of knowing generate distinct analyses of social processes and distinct interpretations of events, each with its grains of truth and its insights into the actors' various outlooks. [Brown and Vibert 1996:xix]

Cruikshank writes that "such an approach directs us back to the social processes in which all accounts are embedded," and points out that stories and oral histories about events in the past are interpretations of these events that are influenced by "culturally distinct ideas about family and community organization" (1996:434). An ethnohistorical approach, as suggested by Raymond Fogelson, is foundational to the use of oral history as a research method.

> Such an approach insists on taking seriously native theories of history as embedded in cosmology, in narratives, in rituals and ceremonies, and more generally in native philosophies and worldviews. Implicit here is the assumption that events may be recognized, defined, evaluated, and endowed with meaning differentially in different cultural traditions. [Fogelson 1989:134]

Fogelson suggests that events do not generate narratives, but "events are selected to cohere to story lines, frameworks, or plots that result in intelligible narratives," "events can be drawn from many levels, go in divergent directions, recognize different time scales and crisscross one another" (*ibid.*:141). The ways that information about steamship fuel was provided to us largely centered on the community that participated in activities related to the steamships in different ways, *i.e.*, stores set up outside of Fort McPherson, people cutting wood in the Mouth of the Peel area and the way that was intertwined with many other community activities. The way that wood was provided for steamships was incorporated into the patterns of life that allowed people to continue to remain on the land, and it is the patterns of life that people talk about when discussing their interaction with the land. The major change in this interaction was instigated by the sheer amount of fuel that was required, and the fact that as one elder pointed out, the steamships burned any type of wood. That is from any type of tree, green or dry. Thus the use of wood by Gwich'in in the area changed in two important ways even though the yearly round of life

was not drastically altered by the fact that people made use of an outside source of employment.

The information that Neil Colin shared with us in the interviews, and the information that he, and other elders, shared with us during less formal conversations, can be extremely useful when approached from a metapragmatic perspective. The practical category of wood, and talk about this category in a Gwich'in community indexes life on the land because wood, and the ways it is gathered, are part of a complex system of activities. During the recorded interview and on many other occasions Neil spoke about his memories as they revolve around people and places

To remove Gwich'in knowledge that surrounds the category of wood, from Gwich'in understandings about living on the land, is problematic in several ways. As evidenced by Neil Colin's words and what I have observed about activities such as the collection of fire wood and sticky gum (chapter three), the practical category of wood is most productively considered in relation to the activities and meanings that it can be understood to index.

4.5 Summary

While the Gwich'in cultural landscape and the cultural landscape that is valued as an economic and industrial resource are perhaps largely incommensurate, cross-cultural understanding of different cultural representations of environment is possible. After considering Eileen Koe's advice and a selection of contemporary anthropological work concerned with, among other things, cross-cultural communication, I have found that the concept of sustainability can be used to identify a possible "intersection" of cultures, at

which different representations of environment can be understood (Feit 2001:445). Assumptions about cross-cultural meanings should be examined, as the discrepancies between specific research questions and the answers considered to be appropriate from a Gwich'in perspective, can illuminate a great deal. In the next chapter I will continue to examine some of the social and cultural dimensions of the Gwich'in perspectives on sustainability that were shared with me in the context of this forestry project.

Chapter Five

Sustainability

5.1 Introduction

My fieldwork experiences in the community of Fort McPherson, are strongly tied to my participation in the forestry project, designed to assist in the drafting of a sustainable forestry management plan for the Gwich'in Settlement Area. Echoing the words of many other organizations that seek to establish long term plans that can be characterized as sustainable, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development states that "the challenge in defining sustainable development is that it means different things to different people; it is a reflection of community values" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 1997:8). As I have discussed in the previous two chapters, Gwich'in use and knowledge of forest resources are part of a larger system of land use based in cultural understandings. In order to further my description of how I learned about the Gwich'in way of life, and thereby attempt to reflect community values, I will address Gwich'in interaction with specific features of the land, namely berry patches.

Berry picking is an important part of living on the land and, as was intended by those Gwich'in who felt I should learn about it in order to contribute to the sustainable forestry project, it provides an excellent example with which to examine the meaning of sustainability in a Gwich'in context. Addressing the practice of berry picking in response to a specific request that I recognize, and respect how I learned about the Gwich'in way of life is also an excellent opportunity to further my exploration of cross-cultural communication.

5.2 Assumptions

In an examination of policy negotiations between Natives and non-Natives in Alaska, Phyllis Morrow and Chase Hensel describe some of the ways in which Native cultures can be redefined according to Western categories, and as a result their cultural practices become codified and the rights of Native people to have any significant variation in their cultural practices become limited. More importantly, they suggest that "the use of an unexamined common vocabulary to create a false sense of agreement among the parties is partially based on the assumption that translated or cross-cultural meanings are congruent rather than merely overlapping" (1992:39). They refer to concepts like "conservation," "subsistence," and "traditional use," that are provided by English speaking participants in policy negotiations. In such negotiations, the concept of conservation is considered to be valued by Natives and non-Natives, however as Morrow and Hensel point out, "disguised are the different meanings--and practices--attached to this concept" (*ibid.*:42).

As with the concept of "conservation," the concept of sustainability enters Gwich'in discourse from a framework that is foreign to Gwich'in worldview. As I have come to understand it, "living on the land" is an inherently sustainable dimension of Gwich'in culture. Although such a relationship can be described in a certain vocabulary as sustainable, a Gwich'in understanding of sustainability is at the same time incompatible with concepts that are closely tied to sustainability in the same foreign framework, *i.e.*, management and development. Instead, the Gwich'in concept of sustainability is based on the sharing of knowledge concerning how to live with the land in a way that both sustains and is sustained by cultural values.

> Knowledge in hunting societies is encoded at critical points in a belief system, sustained over centuries, that conceptualizes animals and humans as sharing a common world and their connections as mutually sustaining. When it becomes incorporated into a Western framework, it is reconstituted to formalize relationships between people and becomes embedded in hierarchy and inequality. [Cruikshank 1998:70]

The integration of "living on the land" into sustainable management plans is an example of incorporating Gwich'in knowledge into a Western framework. For example, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada writes that when the report of the Brundtland Commission appeared in 1987, "the concept of sustainable development resonated throughout the international community" and that,

> Among Indigenous communities in Canada, it was heralded as a vindication of sorts – a recognition that living in harmony with the natural environment must become the lifestyle of the future, not just for now. [Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2000:10]

Recognizing that Indigenous people would find value in the construction of such a concept by non-Indigenous peoples does not necessarily entail consideration of the complex and specific cultural and historical processes by which Indigenous peoples have sustained their landscape, and as such does not form a basis from which sustainable development can be integrated into life in Indigenous communities. In this case, such a perspective can be taken to say more about the cultural standpoint of the author than of the subject. "Living in harmony with the natural environment" still implies the separation of humans from the world around them, an idea that does not adequately describe what the Gwich'in refer to as "living on the land."

For example, Tim Ingold writes that to say nature is a cultural construction is an easy claim to make but what is more interesting is to understand the implications of such a statement (1996:117). He argues that such a claim is actually incoherent because it is

not accurate when applied to hunter-gatherer societies. He writes that hunter-gatherers "do *not*, as a rule, approach their environment as an external world of nature that has to be 'grasped' conceptually and appropriated symbolically within the terms of an imposed cultural design, as a precondition for effective action" (*ibid.*:120). He writes that the contrast between these two ways (the one characterized as hunter-gatherer and the other as Western) is not a contrast between alternative ways of apprehending the world, of which the Western one may be the only one that is "characterized as the construction of a view, that is, as a process of mental representation. As for the other, apprehending the world is not a matter of construction but of engagement, not of building but of dwelling, not of making a view *of* the world but of taking up a view *in* it" (*ibid.*:121).

> My argument is that the differences between the activities of hunting and gathering on the one hand, and singing, story-telling and the narration of myth on the other, cannot be accommodated within the terms of a dichotomy between the material and the mental, between ecological interactions *in* nature and cultural constructions *of* nature. On the contrary, both sets of activities are, in the first place, ways of dwelling. The latter, as I have shown, amount not to a metaphorical representation of the world, but a form of poetic involvement. But it is no different with the activities of hunting and gathering, which entail the same attentive engagement with the environment, and the same exploratory quest for knowledge. In hunting and gathering, as in singing and story telling, the world 'opens out' to people. Hunter-gatherers, in their practices, do not seek to transform the world; they seek revelation. In short, through the practical activities of hunting and gathering, the environment – including the landscape with its flora and fauna – enters directly into the constitution of persons, not only as a source of nourishment but also as a source of knowledge. [Ingold 1996:144]

Ingold's assertion here is that hunter-gatherer interaction with their environment is based in a process of "dwelling" in which story telling, narration, singing, *etc.*, are connected in integral ways to the practical activities of hunting, processing and gathering. By examining community values in context, and by listening to talk about "practical activities" and their many values, a highly integrated Gwich'in framework of

sustainability becomes visible, upon which the Western concept of sustainability may be mapped in order to illuminate where systems of meanings might overlap. As Ingold points out, the practices of hunter-gatherers are based on fundamentally different understandings than those of Western societies; therefore, what it means to sustain interaction with features of the environment and how, are richly entrenched in issues of perspective. Listening to Gwich'in talk about berry patches, and berry picking has provided a way into understanding an entire complex of ideas and meanings that involve sustaining both the land and social relationships.

5.3 Gwich'in Berry Picking

While the Gwich'in people that spent time with me know their land and culture to sustain each other in complex and dynamic ways, it is important to recognize that the way this relationship is made meaningful to outsiders makes use of discursive and political strategies. Picking berries is an important part of Gwich'in life on the land, and is part of a number of activities that may take place on the land at any time during the summer months. While referring to a different, very specific situation, Regna Darnell writes that survivors of residential schools often found it difficult to return home because, among many things, "they did not know the things that integrated life" in Reserve communities (1994:75). I find that thinking about "things that integrate life" is a useful way to locate what might be culturally meaningful. The way that wood is collected for various purposes, the ways that berries are picked, and the ways that moose are hunted are examples of "things that integrate life" in Gwich'in communities. When people speak about past and present systems of gathering various types of wood, *e.g.*, for steamships

and for community construction projects, they speak about these activities in relation to community life and the ways in which such activities have encompassed important historical events, economic changes, social change and cultural continuity. Oral history, as a research methodology, is based on recognizing the value of this type of discourse that is heavily contextualized with respect to people and places. It is through this discourse that local patterns of the "things that integrate life" emerge and so it follows that the process of sustaining the Gwich'in landscape is also heavily contextualized with reference to people and places.

Much of my time in Fort McPherson was spent picking berries with Eileen Koe and her daughters and grandchildren, along with several other Gwich'in women. In Fort McPherson the amount of talk about berries and berry picking is immediately noticeable to an outsider; talk about the current, past and predicted future state of various berry patches, berry picking expeditions of the past, good areas, areas that have changed, and berry picking associated with other activities like moose hunting and fishing. Berries are an important summer food, and stories told to me by Gwich'in elder women emphasize the important role that berries played in the local diet when they were young, as berry picking was an activity to be taken seriously, something to be done well.

Although I would usually "go for berries" with the same women, we were often joined by others who had picked with other people on different occasions and they would offer directions on where to go based on what they knew. My berry picking experiences are largely the result of Eileen Koe's berry picking history. That is, I would accompany her to patches that she knew of, due to her previous experiences and connections to people that shared information with her. Eileen's camp at Eight Miles is located on the

opposite side of the Peel from Fort McPherson, on the side that lead to the mountains. This means that while people are waiting for the ferry, they often run in for a quick cup of tea and to say hello. People often stopped by the camp with the express reason of informing Eileen of how they did berry picking and where. It seems that asking about berries, "did you have a chance to check anywhere," is a polite question, as in my experience it was often used by Gwich'in women to open, or facilitate conversation with me, as an outsider, and also with other Gwich'in women. While I have qualified this as polite, it seems that it may not always be used for the same reasons, but is usually a question that people welcome, and like to ask in anticipation of what information the response may bring.

I was told by several different women that as children they would walk up into the hills from the Peel River with their mothers, aunties, or grandmothers to pick large quantities of berries, as they were an important food source. The places that these women went to pick berries when they were young continue to be those that they return to in the present day. While I am not sure about the situation in the past, today some women will also travel great distances-some as far as the Ogilvie Mountains in order to find highly productive berry patches. What this might indicate is that women do return to certain areas continually but they are also highly explorative in their search for berries.

The way that people are willing to travel to locate new and productive berry patches is related to the enjoyment that most Gwich'in take from traveling, seeing and spending time in both familiar and new places on the land. It is an important part of picking berries, among other activities, yet people sometimes run into trouble when they explore areas that are outside of their legally designated space. I was told about an elder

couple who went down to where the Dempster Highway meets the Ogilvie River country to pick berries but were told by an official that they could not pick berries there because it was not Gwich'in land. The husband felt that they could pick there because his family was from this area, it was "his country." As Milton Freeman points out in a discussion of the value of wildlife to the Inupiat, such 'resources' are valuable as resources "whose continued exploitation allows reproduction of the social relations, the values and the distinctive cultural identity of the North Slope Inupiat" (1986:32). Picking berries is an activity that draws on historical and personal ties to features of the land that continue and sustain social relationships.

The berry picking expeditions that I went on covered several kilometers along the Dempster Highway, usually between Eight Miles and James Creek (about 75 km), but many people go beyond that point, especially later in the season when the cranberries are ready in the mountains. Berry picking is also done at well known locations along the river, but fewer people have access to boats. When I went berry picking with people along the highway, it usually meant driving to several different spots and checking on the patches to see if the berries were ready to be picked or if they had already been picked. Even if a productive patch was found and we would pick there for quite a while, other patches would always be checked. These women are familiar with many patches over a vast area, not only with where they are, but with their productivity status, *i.e.*, if they are currently sufficiently productive to be picked, and if not when they last were. Yellowberries (*Rubus chamaemorus*) (see Appendix, Photograph 9), and cranberries (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea)* grow at ground level, while blueberries (*Vaccinium uliginosum)*

grow on low bushes, not that much higher than ground level[11]. The terrain is usually soggy tundra, consisting of areas of springy moss with hard lumps here and there that make walking difficult.

While we were checking for good patches, Eileen would tell me about how it is important to pick as many berries from many different patches. By doing this you are taking care of the patches and in order for a patch to continue to be productive it needs to be picked well. Even when we had enough berries, we would continue along the highway, stopping every so often to check other patches. Before heading home, Eileen would usually fill at least one garbage bag with moss (*"nin'* " Andre and Fehr 2001:60) that she used for cleaning fish, and for cleaning her hands while working with fish. *Lidii Masgit* (Labrador tea) is also often collected on these excursions, to add to regular tea as flavor or to use medicinally. When we would see a berry patch that had not been picked well, but we did not have time to pick it, Eileen would comment on how it was a shame that it had not been picked properly and on several occasions she marked such patches with a plastic bag, pop can, or simply by breaking a branch, so that she could easily find them when she had a chance to return.

While there is a great deal of talk about berries during the summer months anyway, several people took the time to tell me about the different things that berries are used for, namely different ways in which people like to eat them. These conversations would usually include talk about how important berries were in the past as a treat, change in diet, and major food source. Not as much was directly said to me about how important

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[11] In Tetlit Gwich'in (ripe) Blueberries are "*dindezrii*", Cranberry is "*natl'at*", and Yellowberry is "*nakal*" (Andre and Fehr 2001:40). In my experience the word "*nakal*" was always used for Yellowberries even when people were speaking English, while the English words "blueberry" and "cranberry" were used when people were speaking English.

berries continue to be, and I assume that this is because a person can see for herself the ways that berries are used and valued. Many people eat them with meals in summer, children eat them as treats, they are frozen and put away to eat with Loche liver in the winter (Wishart: personal communication), and they are used in the special dishes that are prepared for community feasts in a mix of bush food and the store bought foods considered to be appropriate for special occasions. Most people that I encountered consider the local berries to be quite delicious, and especially valuable because fresh fruit sold in the shops in town usually arrives in less than desirable condition and is expensive.

Although fresh fruit from the store is expensive, this does not explain why people put so much effort into picking berries. Most people travel quite some distance out of town to pick berries, which requires a vehicle, other people to go with, money for gas, usually a gun, and quite a bit of time as picking a significant quantity is hard work. Also, in the summer months the "fruit man" visits Fort McPherson and Inuvik. The fruit man drives a semi-truck up from British Columbia every few weeks and sells "*uunjit* berries[12]," and other fruit and vegetables for reasonable prices. As Thomas Thornton points out in regards to the Glacier Bay Tlingit, economic models alone cannot explain the perseverance of important connections to berries because they are expensive and time consuming to pick, especially when compared with the cost of purchasing substitute fruits (1999:42).

Yellowberries, are the first to be ready, usually sometime in July. I assume it is because they are the first berry to be ready (blueberries are next, and then cranberries in the early fall) that there is such a great deal of excitement over these berries. The summer of 2000 was not good for these berries as they did not seem to ripen on time, as one lady

[12] White man berries, mainly strawberries and cherries.

said "they still have their little parkys on." The summer of 1999 was good for these berries and the excitement was easy to feel. Any evening with good weather would see trucks parked at many of the good spots along the highway. Some people will move up into the mountains, especially when the cranberries are ready, and camp there for weeks at a time in order to pick as much as possible and often leave with several five gallon pails full of berries. Full containers of berries are considered to be an appealing sight, "just nice," like fat whitefish or moose in the summer time.

In the hills just above the Peel River, blueberry bushes are found in areas that are interspersed with small spruce trees, and Eileen and I once collected some of the new "purple cones" ("*dineedzil*" in Tetlit Gwich'in, Andre and Fehr 2001:17) from these short trees as these cones are covered in sap. The cones are boiled and the tea is used for colds and flus, or to maintain good health as with sticky gum. These trees are about six feet tall, and are rarely used for anything except occasionally for "brush," that is, as flooring material in the canvas tents that many people use while staying on the land. In 1999, several people were concerned about one of these places, that is an area consisting of berry patches interspersed with these small spruce trees. People were concerned that these trees were dying as they appeared to be turning red and drying out. The trees in this area are not used for fuel or construction, and as such are not economically valuable; however, the health of these trees generated a great deal of concern as they are considered to be an important feature of that place, of that berry patch. Only a few kilometers up the Dempster Highway from the ferry crossing, this is an area that some women remember walking up to as children and young women before the highway was built. The

importance of this patch, and the concern that arose over the health of the trees are both related to the concern that Gwich'in people have about sustaining the land.

The most prominent feature of the berry picking expeditions that I went on was the presence of several generations, in particular children, who also go about picking berries in ways that they learn to be appropriate and good for securing future productivity (see Appendix, Photograph 8). While we drove along the highway to pick berries, to collect water, or look for moose, people would talk about various places that we passed. For example, while traveling with Eileen and her grandchildren, she would point out important places and talk about their significance. Eileen would tell us (including her grandchildren) about walking up from the river to pick berries when she was younger, and how it was an important thing to do. She told us that she would be part of a group of women and children, and that the children would be discouraged from eating any berries while they picked, because it was important at that time to gather and save as many as possible. While the pressure to gather berries in order to supply a major part of their diet is not the same for Eileen's grandchildren, they are still encouraged to learn how to pick berries, and to learn about places for doing so as a way of learning about their culture and history.

Berry picking, as with most Gwich'in activities involving the land, can be used to illustrate the complementarity of men's and women's activities, as men usually accompany their wives and mothers while at the same time "checking" for moose, caribou or signs of them (this is not to say that Gwich'in women do not watch for such signs as well). Berry picking is also usually tied in with replenishing stocks of drinking water from James Creek, as people do not like to drink the tap water in town. Thomas

and Eileen Koe's grandchildren can point out an impressive number of places along the highway that they know to be important for diverse reasons, *i.e.*, which *Jijuu* (Grandmother) picks berries where, where a moose was recently shot and by whom, where the caribou have crossed the highway in the past, to name a few.

When seen in this light, the concern about the area where the trees were becoming unhealthy, can be understood, in part, as concern for the future of the berry patch. Taking care of berry patches, checking them, and making sure that children have opportunities to observe these activities, are part of sustaining this resource and in turn, the berry patches themselves are part of the Gwich'in landscape that sustains relationships. These are places that have been connected to stories and experiences that constitute, and are constituted by, Gwich'in cultural meanings.

As I mentioned in the discussion of my research methodology, I had the opportunity to discuss the direction of this thesis with my one of my Gwich'in teachers, Eileen Koe. We discussed the possible directions that this thesis could take within the context of the sustainable forestry project. She suggested that the way to proceed was to recognize, and to be respectful, of how I learned about the Gwich'in way of life. In particular, it is helpful to acknowledge that by going on berry picking trips with Gwich'in elder women and their children and grandchildren, I learned about the cultural significance of berries by observing the transmission of cultural knowledge.

At an anniversary feast held in 1999 in Fort McPherson, the speeches included recognition of the many accomplishments of the couple being celebrated. Alongside the letters of congratulations from the Prime Minister and the Governor General, it was mentioned in several of the speeches that the woman was responsible for maintaining

many berry patches and that they were very productive because of her considerable efforts. This was discussed as one of her major lifetime achievements. After coming to realize how important berry patches are, and why, it is clear that in this sort of public discourse, picking berries refers to sustaining an entire complex of cultural meanings and activities. As Thornton points out, it is "misleading" to identify ideas about berry resources solely in terms of "Western ideologies of resource conservation" (Thornton 1999:36).

5.4 Commensurability

Once recognized as a specifically situated concept, sustainability can be compared to other concepts that have been used heuristically in studies of First Nations communities. As Marc Stevenson points out, the use of "Traditional Ecological Knowledge" is an area fraught with difficulties as the existing framework for using it is not satisfactory. Stevenson points out that such problems have been causing frustration for Aboriginal people, academics and those in the field of resource management for over a decade (2001:4). However, at the same time that the limitations of the concept of TEK are being recognized, policies based on sustainability and sustainable resource management are readily accepted, while the likelihood that such conceptual tools may contain similar problems remains unexamined. As Mark Nuttall points out they are ideas based in specific systems of meanings and assumptions. He writes:

> Sustainable may be the crucial adjective, but the focus is still on *development* and it is often difficult to separate *development* from the idea of *progress* as rooted in the Enlightenment ideal of a free, rational society moving ever onwards and upwards along an evolutionary scale from primitive to modern forms of social life and social institutions. Development, as a process often synonymous with modernisation and progress, often implies a counter-reference to what

> development is all about, *i.e.*, improvement of the 'undeveloped', the 'backward', the 'primitive'. [Nuttall 2000:631]

If "the challenge in defining sustainable development is that it means different things to different people; it is a reflection of community values" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 1997:8), it is problematic that the values that characterize the communities to which the concept of sustainable development is applied in the form of plans and policies, are also characterized as the "counter-reference to what development is all about" (Nuttall 2000:631).

Cris Shore and Susan Wright suggest that "policies encapsulate the entire history and culture of the society that generated them" (1997:7).

> If anthropology has saliency for understanding policies as political and administrative processes, the converse is also true. Policies are inherently and unequivocally *anthropological* phenomena. They can be read by anthropologists in a number of ways: as cultural texts, as classificatory devices with various meanings, as narratives that serve to justify or condemn the present, or as rhetorical devices and discursive formations that function to empower some people and silence others. Not only do policies codify social norms and values, and articulate fundamental organizing principles of society they also contain implicit (and sometimes explicit) models of society. [Shore and Wright 1997:7]

A policy is therefore interesting both generally, as a concept itself, and specifically in its reference to social norms and values and its implications for social and cultural processes. As Shore and Wright point out, the concept of policy is most interesting in its ability to "create whole new sets of relationships between individuals, groups, and objects" (*ibid.*). Following Shore and Wright the following statement can be read as an articulation of the relationships between the groups mentioned.

> Strategies for sustainable forest management, ranging from operational planning tools to novel social and economic institutions, all provide opportunities for the development and empowerment of First Nations Communities, in co-operation with industry and other residents, consistent with the maintenance of the

ecological integrity of the boreal forest. [Sustainable Forest Management Network 1998:10]

While the importance of not imposing a colonial discourse onto what we hear from First Nations participants is reflected in an inspiring amount of anthropological literature, it is even more strongly counter-productive not to recognize the implications of imposing a colonialist discourse upon our research questions. The unexamined use of the concept of sustainability may be usefully used as a tool in other analytical frameworks, however the cross-cultural application of the concept must include recognition of the fact that it, like all others, is a culturally situated concept. To develop and simultaneously empower Gwich'in people is an impossible task, not only because sustainable development and management are non-Gwich'in concepts, but as Nuttall points out, they are strongly situated ideas based in specific systems of meanings and assumptions.

In the summer of 2001 I participated in a preliminary study of the possible establishment of a driftwood based industry in the Gwich'in Settlement Area (such an industry would be established in response to a demand stimulated by the oil and gas industry). While I heard a diverse array of local concerns and opinions about such an industry, I would like to relate Eileen Koe's perspective on this subject as a final example of a Gwich'in perspective on sustainability. Such an industry would make use of driftwood, much of which passes through, and arrives in the GSA on the Peel, Arctic Red Mackenzie Rivers and all of their tributaries; therefore the use of this wood would not directly influence the state of the forests on Gwich'in lands.

Eileen clearly stated that those who are quick to support such an industry are "not thinking about the children." While Eileen is very keen to support local opportunity, she

pointed out that travel along the rivers could possibly be dangerous and at the very least uncomfortable if the resources for providing fast and strong heat were not available. Eileen also made it clear that by creating the possibility that this resource might not be available for future generations (as the size and duration of the possible industry, and the long term effects it would have on the delta are not known and difficult to predict), people would be making a decision that would affect the future of Gwich'in culture. Taking large amounts of driftwood out of the rivers without fully understanding the consequences could affect the ability of Gwich'in people to "live on the land," in two basic ways. That is, the short term absence of driftwood as it is taken away in large quantities could prove disastrous to those traveling on the land at that time, and also the possibility of a more general, long term impact on the rivers, eddies, banks might affect the options available to future generations (Wishart and Murray 2001:17). As evidenced in the ways that I learned about the importance of berry picking, features of the landscape are central to Gwich'in cultural transmission and not being able to travel on the river, to "pass spring" on the delta for example would strongly affect future generations.

The Gwich'in land is also linked to economic opportunities for the community that tie in with larger political and economic systems based in different cultural perspectives. In response to this many of the Gwich'in people that I have spoken to suggest that the elders should determine the directions that plans and policies take, as they have the most intimate knowledge of the land and the processes by which it is sustained. While sustainability as it relates to the Gwich'in landscape is inherently incommensurable with sustainability as it relates to other cultural landscapes, there are points at which cross-cultural understanding can occur, and different representations of

the physical landscape can be meaningful when shared with those familiar with landscapes that are meaningful in distinctly different ways. Thus by asking what sustains people and their relationship to their environment, the concept of sustainability can be a valuable tool.

5.5 Summary

Consideration of Eileen Koe's advice that I recognize and be respectful of how I learned about the Gwich'in way of life has required that I recognize how hard it is to let go of one's own preconceptions, and thereby open up the boundaries of my own introduction to the Gwich'in way of life. Sustainability, as a concept that is specifically linked to cultural concepts of resource use, development and management is largely incommensurable with Gwich'in cultural understandings and landscape. The application of inappropriate concepts can easily occur when assumptions are made about the use of a shared vocabulary; however, exploring diverse perspectives on such concepts can illuminate important features and enhance cross-cultural communication.

Conclusions and Reflections

The term "sustainability," from the parlance of those in the forestry industry, is not commensurate with any category in the vocabulary of those Gwich'in who I worked with at Eight Miles while participating in the sustainable forestry management project. As I have addressed issues in this thesis that are already well known among the Gwich'in, I have focused this thesis in anticipation of a wider audience, potentially concerned with the social and cultural dimensions of sustainable management plans, and who contribute to the formulation of such plans based on cross-cultural research.

To consider, and respect how I learned about Gwich'in culture was a strategy suggested to me by a Gwich'in elder, in order to help me address the discrepancies that I observed between ideas about sustainability and resources as represented by the forestry project in which I was participating and what I learned about the Gwich'in relationship to the land while doing so. In summary, the opportunities that I had to observe some of the ways in which the relationship between the Gwich'in and their land is sustained also provided me with opportunities to observe these discrepancies. For example, by listening to different types of talk about berry picking, by picking berries and by traveling to and from berry patches with Gwich'in women and their children and grandchildren it became clear that picking berries is valued as an activity that sustains an entire complex of cultural meanings and activities. Berry picking is only one example of the ways in which the relationship to the land is sustained. By listening to people speak about berry picking it became clear to me that the important feature of this activity is this relationship, and that the need to negotiate this relationship with ideas of the sustainability of resource use is the result of a wide ranging effort, initiated outside of the Gwich'in community, to

incorporate First Nations communities into projects that focus on sustaining different features of this type of activity, *i.e.*, the resource rather than the relationship.

Although these efforts are part of projects that seek to use research questions suggested in part by First Nations communities, that they continue to incorporate such questions into an established conceptual framework obscures the good intentions of those involved. What I have learned from those people in Fort McPherson who have participated in projects of this nature before, is that this pattern of developing plans and policies leaves those who have worked within this system wondering what the problem is; however, many of these people continue to be committed to sharing knowledge in ways considered to be appropriate by Gwich'in standards.

The goal of this project, to learn about local categories, perspectives and concerns relating to Gwich'in forestry practices has allowed me to follow advice from Eileen Koe and to focus on the ways in which I learned about such perspectives and concerns, thereby recognizing that the concept of sustainability can be useful when it is used to illuminate different perspectives and concerns, to ask what sustains people and their relationship to their environment. In this way it may prove to be an "intersection," (Feit 2001: 445) at which cross-cultural understanding can occur, and different representations of the physical landscape can become meaningful across cultural boundaries, but as Feit points out such intersections are most useful when examined in relation to the political and discursive strategies from which they arise (*ibid.*). "Living on the land" as it was suggested by several Gwich'in to the researchers involved in this forestry project is an example of such an intersection. Tied in with messages of cultural strength and survival, the people that I spent time with at Eight Miles offered us an opportunity to learn about

their relationship to the land by listening and observing, and in response to our request to learn about forestry practices, past and present.

In the context of a sustainable forest management project, Gwich'in concerns about sustaining the land have emerged as concerns about the ability of present and future generations to access and use their land, and to continue to sustain the land with their actions. Therefore policies, regulations and plans for future activities that will affect Gwich'in interaction with their land must necessarily take such concerns into consideration. This becomes increasingly complicated when non-Gwich'in concepts and categories, (*i.e.,* forest resources, sustainability) are used to structure plans and policies concerned with the Gwich'in relationship to the land. In regards to this project, several Gwich'in people said that the elders should be the ones who suggest outlines for policies and for the research questions that affect the shape that policies and plans will take as they have a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and social dimensions of the relationship through which the Gwich'in relationship to the land is sustained. Suggestions based in Gwich'in perspectives must be addressed in a way that more fully accounts for concerns about sustainability of culture and community as they sustain the land, rather than simply concerns about the sustainability of resources, and of resource use.

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Appendix: Photographs

Photograph 1: The Dempster Highway is a 750 km gravel road that begins 40 km from Dawson city at Dawson Corner, in the Yukon Territory. It ends in Inuvik, about 150 km north of Fort McPherson. It is the only road to Fort McPherson and Inuvik.

Photograph 2: Thomas Koe checking his net with his grandchildren in 1999. In the background are the Peel River ferry, ferry maintenance buildings and Winnie's Canteen. There are several fish camps in the willows to the right and behind the visible buildings.

Photograph 3: Eileen Koe with one of her grand-daughters at her fish camp at Eight Miles, July 2000.

Photograph 4: Old cabins at Mouth of the Peel. Photograph by Neil Colin, Spring 2000.

Photograph 5: A camp on the bank of the Peel River. Below the cabins is a large piece of the bank which collapsed due to unusually high water during the summer and spring of 2000.

Photograph 6: This photograph, taken in July of 1999, shows the sawmill operation at Eight Miles. Most of these logs were floated down from places up river during the spring, when the water is high and the logs are easy to peel. Trees of this size and quality are usually found along the creeks, and adjoining lakes, that join the Peel River upriver from Eight Miles.

Photograph 7: This camp, located across the river from where the logs for the Co-op building were collected and processed, includes a fish house that was built in 1999 with the slabs that are left when the logs were squared off. In 1999 the slabs were visible at many camps as they were incorporated into new and old structures. They were sold by the sawmill for $1 each.

Photograph 8: Eileen Koe with one of her daughters and grand-daughters picking yellow berries near Bonnet Plume Flats. July, 1999.

Photograph 9: Yellowberries, also called cloudberries or baked-apple in English; *Nakal* in Tetlit Gwich'in.